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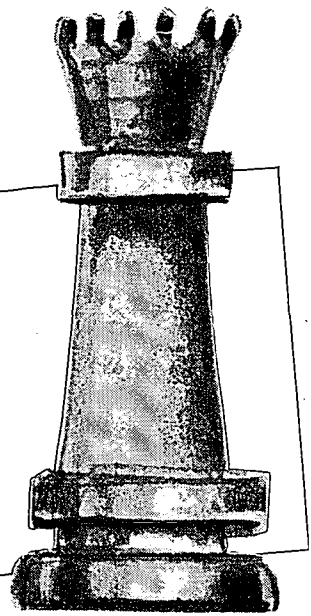

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PUBLIC EYE

It is not generally known, or if known, not generally recognized, that Lawrence Treat was the important pioneer in the origin and development of the contemporary procedural detective novel—the novel of what might be called the "public eye." Of course, in their own times, many famous fictional characters operated as procedural detectives; for examples, Gaboriau's Lecoq, in his own (and by today's standards, primitive) way; the various detectives whose exploits (chiefly imagined) were chronicled by Allan Pinkerton; R. Austin Freeman's Dr. Thorndyke, with his scientific (and still sound) methods; and Freeman Wills Crofts's Inspector French cases which surely emphasized legwork and painstaking investigation.

But it was Lawrence Treat who gave the realistic procedural approach a feeling of substance and unity in a modern sense. His earliest novel in this genre was V AS IN VICTIM, *published in 1945 (nearly 20 years ago!) which was 10 years before J. J. Marric's (John Creasey's) first Gideon novel,* GIDEON'S DAY *(1955), and 11 years before Ed McBain's first novel of the 87th Precinct,* COP HATER *(1956). Other Lawrence Treat novels were called, in a title pattern all his own,* H AS IN HUNTED, Q AS IN QUICKSAND, F AS IN FLIGHT, *and* T AS IN TRAPPED. *Anthony Boucher made the historical point clear when he wrote: "The prime pioneer in the naturalistic novel of police procedure was Lawrence Treat whose stories . . . are not only far ahead of their times but admirable in themselves."*

(Note to Anthony Boucher: How would you classify William MacHarg's THE AFFAIRS OF O'MALLEY*—short stories which were first published in book form in 1940 but began to appear in magazines much earlier? Wasn't it William MacHarg, that grand old man, who started the procedural trend?)*

But to get back to Lawrence Treat and his major contribution to the form: two characters carry the ball, as a kind of 'tec team, in Mr. Treat's procedural stories—detective Mitch Taylor and laboratory technician Jub Freeman. (Was it sheer coincidence that Mr. Treat chose the same surname as Dr. Thorndyke's creator, R. Austin Freeman?) The germ of Mitch Taylor's character (the germ only) came out of a five-minute interview that Mr. Treat had at a New York City precinct house in the early 1940s, when Mr. Treat and a friend reported some obscene anonymous phone calls. The germ of Jub Freeman came from Mr. Treat's persistent "hanging around"

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the New York City technical lab—the perfect place, of course, for Jub Freeman to be born. Other realistic details, of procedure and technique and background, emerged from an unofficial "hitch" with the San Diego police force while Edward Dieckman was Chief of Homicide (Mr. Dieckman has since become a true-crime writer who really "knows his stuff").

And now Lawrence Treat has begun, especially for EQMM, a new series of short stories about Jub Freeman, Mitch Taylor, and Taylor's superior, Lieutenant Decker; and you will find them engrossing tales of the now popular procedural style. But we did want you to realize that in a contemporary sense it was Lawrence Treat who blazed this particular trail —the police procedural novel—and all credit to Mr. Treat for his significant contribution.

L AS IN LOOT

by LAWRENCE TREAT

IT WAS THE MIDDLE OF THE morning when Mitch Taylor drove the patrol car through the archway and into the big courtyard in the center of the municipal building. He parked in the space reserved for police, picked up the hub cap with the bullet hole—if it was a bullet hole—and stuck it under his arm.

Mitch Taylor was a stocky guy, of medium height, chesty, with a small-featured face that had enough flesh on it to take an occasional sock without getting hurt. He always looked cheerful enough but you could never tell what he was thinking, because usually it was nothing. Or anyhow, nothing you ought to know.

What he was thinking now was, he should have left the thing back there in the junk yard where he'd spotted it. Because he was going on vacation tomorrow—three weeks of it up at the lake—and no new business was going to mess up that vacation.

A couple of hours ago he'd had everything figured out. He still had those summonses to serve, and he'd string those out till afternoon. Then he'd stop in at the garage and tell them there was something wrong with the steering, he didn't know exactly what, they'd better look it over. He'd hang around while they found nothing, and when it was time to quit, they'd stop kidding themselves and he could go home and start packing.

That's what life was for. Vacations. Him and Amy and the kids, taking it easy, having a good time.

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A girl like Amy, she came ahead of everything else. She always had and always would.

Still, when a hub cap starts telling you stuff, you can't pass it up. You take it up to the lab and find out—from Jub Freeman, who was a wizard at things like that.

Jub, perched on a stool and hunched over a work bench, was studying something under a microscope when Mitch marched into the lab. At the sound of the door Jub swung around, grinned, and ran his hand through what was left of his hair, which was pretty well thinned out from brain-work.

"Hi," he said energetically. "All set to go?"

"Right after breakfast tomorrow. Bought me a hub cap, too, on account I had one missing."

Jub glanced at the disk in Mitch's hand. "That's the new one?" Jub asked.

Mitch shook his head. "No, I got mine outside. Thought maybe you'd want to look this one over."

Jub took it and examined it carefully. He tilted it so that the light caught it at an angle, then he bent down and squinted at the hole. He ran his finger along the rim, turned the cap around, and studied the inside. After a couple of minutes he put it down on his work bench.

"Chevy," he said. "Almost brand-new. Not driven in the winter because there's no corrosion from the salt. No wrench marks, either. Where'd you get it, Mitch?"

"Junk yard," Mitch answered. He didn't give any details and Jub didn't ask for them. Jub merely tapped the disk as if he wanted to test the ring it gave out.

"Brand-new Chevy," Jub said again. "Are you thinking the same thing I am?"

"Rogan," Mitch said promptly.

Jub nodded. Rogan was a bank robber who'd broken out of jail the month before and was still on the loose. His picture, on Wanted sheets, was all over the place and showed a squat, heavy-set guy with bulging eyes, a broad bulging forehead, and spread ears. A teller at the Farmers' Bank had identified him as one of the pair that had held up the bank a week ago and got away with $14,000, after exchanging shots with the guard. They'd been driving a brand-new, stolen Chevy; but they'd ditched it somewhere, switched cars, and smashed their way through a road block, where they'd killed a State Trooper in a gun battle and then escaped in his car. The state car had been found the next day, with the body of one of the bandits in it. But neither Rogan nor the money had showed up.

Jub fingered the hub cap. "Didn't notice a new Chevy in that junk yard, did you?"

"When I got a vacation coming up?"

Jub got the point. "Look," he said. "Why don't you go back there while I check this over? If it's a

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bullet, I'll know it from the trace metals, and I can drive over later and try to spot the Chevy. That way, I'll turn in the report, not you. Okay?"

Mitch nodded. "Just so I don't get tagged with a case," he said.

But out at the junk yard again, Mitch saw he'd taken on too much. There were acres of cars—rusty jalopies, smashed-up wrecks, cars without motors, cars without wheels, cars upside down or lying on their sides. Killer cars—and over-age cars that had been towed here to die a natural death. They were stacked up everywhere and they overflowed into a marshy hollow wild with sumac or something . . . Easy to run a hot car in here, bust it up with an ax, and then seem to abandon it. And maybe with $14,000 in cash, locked up in the trunk . . . It was possible—a graveyard of old cars was a pretty safe hiding place for loot.

Nevertheless Mitch realized he had pulled a boner coming back. Because after a while this Jackson fellow who ran the place would come over and ask Mitch what he was doing. Mitch would say he was just looking, or else he'd say he was doing calisthenics or something, and the guy would get nasty about it and the whole thing would end up with an arrest. Then Mitch would have to hang around tomorrow so he could show up in court.

This Jackson fellow was built like a tackling dummy, except he had muscles instead of cotton wadding inside him. An hour ago he'd told Mitch to fork over fifty cents and go out and find his own hub cap. Tough cookie, this Jackson.

Any other time Mitch would have taken it all in stride and walked in without any worries except maybe was there any poison ivy around. But now he stared at the shack that was supposed to be an office, over there at the other end of the lot. There was no sign of Jackson, so the hell with him.

Mitch had gone about twenty or thirty feet, watching his step so he didn't trip over the rusty springs and fenders and stuff, when the kid's voice sounded out. "Boom-boom—you're dead!"

Mitch swung around and saw this brat with the toy gun. He was maybe six years old, but for a second or two that mug of his had wrinkles and the gun was real, so Mitch froze.

There couldn't be two faces like that—the same bulging eyes and spread ears and oversized forehead. For that second Mitch felt as if he were seeing Rogan cut down to size. Then the kid's eyes seemed to get a little smaller, the ears weren't quite so spread out, and the forehead looked almost normal. Mitch wasn't sure now, except the impression stuck.

Yes, this was Rogan's kid. He was sure of it.

Mitch let out a smile, lifted his hands and said, hamming it up,

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"You got me, kid. Now what?"

The kid stared, bug-eyed. Mitch, real friendly-like, said, "What's your name, huh?"

The kid didn't answer.

You can chase a kid in the open and catch him easy, but six-year-olds are slippery and they get through narrow spaces where a grown man can trip and land flat on his puss. And by the time Mitch could get hold of the kid and drag him off, Mitch would have Jackson on his neck, and then what?

So Mitch said, "You know what?"

The kid didn't move.

Mitch lowered his hands and said, "I give up. Now you take me to jail and lock me up." And trying to make like a crook caught with the goods, he approached the kid.

"Pretend that's your car over there," Mitch said softly. "You bring me over there and make me drive, see? You just keep your gun on me, and I can't do a thing about it."

The kid still stood his ground, still didn't say anything. Maybe he was scared or maybe they'd left the brains out of him and he didn't have enough sense to scram. Anyhow, all he did was say, "Boom-boom" again, but in a frightened kind of a whisper.

So Mitch put his arm around him, and when the kid tried to pull back, Mitch picked him up and said, "What's your name, huh? What are you doing here?"

The kid shook his head and dropped the toy gun. Mitch picked it up, stuck it in his pocket, and brought the kid over to the squad car and settled him down on the front seat. Mitch chattered all the way back to headquarters, but the kid didn't say a word. His vocabulary was *boom-boom*, and that was it.

He took Mitch's hand when they got out of the car, and he kept hanging on tight while they walked down the corridor and through the door marked Homicide Squad. There, a couple of the boys were kidding around with the blonde who did secretarial work for the lieutenant.

They stopped talking at the sight of Mitch and the kid. Bankhart said, "Holy hell—did you make a pinch?"

The blonde smiled and bent down and said to the kid in a soft, sugary voice, "Hello. What's your name?"

Junior's face puckered up like a walnut and he burst out crying. Mitch, still holding his hand, said, "He don't talk much. Lieutenant in?"

The girl nodded. Mitch, dragging this yowling brat along with him, crossed the room, knocked on the lieutenant's door, and went in.

Lieutenant Decker had the smallest office and the biggest collection of junk in the Police Department. He went in for souvenirs of his cases and for magazines on criminology, and he stacked them up on

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the filing cabinets and the shelves and the window sill and the extra chair, along with the official reports he was always in the middle of reading. He swung around and looked at Mitch and the kid as if they both belonged in the loony bin, which maybe they did.

"Well?" Decker said. But the kid let out a blast and kept pumping it out, and Decker put his hands over his ears. When the kid finally stopped for breath, Mitch had a chance to say something.

"Take a gander at him," Mitch said. "What does he look like?"

"Like a damn nuisance," Decker said. "What's the idea?"

Things weren't working out exactly the way Mitch had intended. He'd figured the gang outside might be a little slow on the trigger, but the lieutenant ought to be sharper. Still, Mitch had to admit that a six-year-old, with his face screwed up and his heart in shreds on account maybe he wanted his mother, didn't look much like Public Enemy Number One.

All Mitch said was, "He got lost."

"Brother!" the lieutenant exclaimed. "You've pulled some screwy ones, but this time—wow! Listen, Taylor. In case nobody ever told you, the Homicide Squad handles crimes of violence against the person, but there's a Lost and Found Department and a Juvenile Bureau, and you can classify the kid either way. Use your own judgment." Decker grinned. "What's really on your mind?"

Mitch came straight out with it. "He's Rogan's kid."

Decker flipped back in his chair and almost dumped over. "Did he tell you that?"

"No. But when he quits crying, he looks like Rogan."

"And when does that happen?" Decker asked.

"Lieutenant," Mitch said, "this looks like a lead. I could be wrong, but do you want to bet on it?"

Decker nodded. "Yes," he said. "How much?"

Mitch didn't take the bait. "What I want," he said, "is we should put the kid's description on the teletype and on the municipal radio. A kind of appeal. Then somebody comes and picks him up, and we tail whoever it is."

Decker frowned, searched his soul, and decided to give Mitch a break. "All right," Decker said. "You're going on vacation tomorrow, you'll be out of my hair. Tell the girl to send it out."

"Thanks," Mitch said, and went outside.

The kid quieted down a little, but he wasn't happy. He needed somebody to blow his nose and tie his left shoelace, which the blonde proceeded to do. Meanwhile, Mitch pulled a form from the supply shelf behind the door and began filling out the description: age, color of eyes, color of hair, height, weight, clothing worn, where found, identi-

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fying scars or marks, if any, and so on.

He handed the sheet to the blonde and told her what the lieutenant had said. Then Mitch took the kid upstairs to Jub.

Jub turned out to be no smarter than the others. He frowned at the kid and said, "Who's he?"

"Rogan," Mitch said.

"Doesn't look like him."

"You know how kids are," Mitch said. "They change. They look like one thing one minute, and a couple of minutes later they're different."

"All right," Jub said, smiling. "Make him look like Rogan."

Mitch perched the kid on a stool, gave it a spin, and turned his back. "What about the hub cap?" he asked.

"A thirty-eight slug, and the car was moving fairly fast when it was hit. What about that Chevy?"

"I found the kid, instead," Mitch said. "I figure Rogan was hiding out back there and used the kid for a lookout. All the kid had to do was make a nuisance of himself, which he's good at, and that would warn Rogan so he could beat it. I picked up junior on account somebody has to come around and claim him."

"Sure," Jub said. "His mother."

For the next couple of hours Mitch hung around kind of nurse-maiding the kid. Word spread that Taylor had come up with a lulu, and guys from other parts of the building dropped in to see.

Mitch explained cheerfully. "He's a child prodigy. Going to grow up and be a mental defective. No work, no trouble. State'll take care of him."

The kid sat in a corner and played with a busted pinball machine. Mitch almost got to like him, because he was a guarantee against a last-minute assignment. So Mitch was figuring on staying put until five, and then he could blow.

But the kid's mother walked in, and she had brown, bulging eyes. Her forehead was sort of wide and her ears almost stuck out of her hairdo. She was a dead ringer for the kid.

She gave her name as Mrs. Leonard Jackson and she said her husband ran an automobile junk yard and her child had been playing there when he'd disappeared. And she thought something ought to be done about it.

She was nervous and scared and determined, all at the same time. She threatened to bring a kidnaping charge, but she wouldn't sign a complaint and nobody could figure out exactly what she was after.

Finally the lieutenant got fed up and gave her a lecture on how she shouldn't let a six-year-old run around loose in a junk yard where he could hurt himself or get lost or something, and she was lucky they didn't bring charges against her and her husband for not taking proper care of their child.

She said they wouldn't dare say

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that to her husband, they were taking advantage of her because she was a woman, and she up and left. As soon as she was gone, the lieutenant burst out laughing. And the ribbing that Mitch got after that was just a beginning. He figured these wisecracks, they'd still be coming at him three weeks from now, when he got back from the lake.

Mitch let them ride him—there was nothing he could do about it; but he kept remembering that hub cap and how the kid had looked like Rogan when he aimed the toy gun. And how maybe that Chevy and the $14,000 in loot *were* in the junk yard. And finally, if a kid looked like his mother, why couldn't he look like his old man, too?

So Mitch, partly because he had this idea in the back of his head and partly because he was sick of being kidded, wanted an excuse to beat it. When he felt the toy gun still there in his pocket, he took the thing out and said maybe he ought to return it. The lieutenant said sure, go ahead, why not?

Before Mitch left, he went upstairs to the lab and told Jub what the score was and asked him to take a trip down to the junk yard. Because, even if Mitch had made a mistake about the kid, that bullet hole was real and there was still a chance of locating the Chevy. So Mitch arranged to meet Jub there and help him look.

The Jackson address was in the west end of town, not too far from the yard. The house was in a fairly good residential section and there were two cars in the driveway, one of them the jalopy Mrs. Jackson had driven down to headquarters, and the other a brand-new job.

Because of the new car and because nobody who ran a broken-down junk yard could afford to live in a house like this, Mitch had a funny feeling as he walked up the short path to the front door and rang the bell. The Jackson female opened the door, and she looked just as scared and nervous as she had been at headquarters.

She kind of shrank back from Mitch and then she said, "We just phoned and asked to have you come and bring it, and they said you were on your way." She raised her voice and called out, "Len, he's here."

Jackson came from somewhere in the rear of the house. "Come on in," he said. He'd been sullen and itching for a scrap when Mitch had bought that hub cap this morning, but now the guy was all smiles and tail-wagging. So he wanted something, and the question was what.

Mitch stepped inside and took the imitation gun out of his pocket. "Junior forgot his toy," he said.

"That's what we wanted, that's what we called about," Jackson said. He grabbed it, and Mitch wondered if maybe the thing meant something and he'd missed out on it.

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He asked directly. "What's so important about it?"

Mrs. Jackson answered. "It's Junior's favorite toy, and he's unhappy without it. He just can't bear to lose it."

"Yeah," Mitch said, thinking how Junior had forgotten all about it ever since Mitch had stuck it in his pocket, and how neither of the Jacksons bothered to give it to the kid now.

So the toy gun was a handle to get Mitch here; they wanted to talk to him and now they were tense and edgy, but Mitch still couldn't figure out what the play was.

Jackson said, "How about a drink?"

And Mrs. Jackson said, "Yes, what would you like?"

"Make it a beer," Mitch said. He kept looking around the room, but he found nothing out of the ordinary, except that the place didn't look used—no personal stuff lying around, as if they'd just got here and hadn't had time to get settled.

The Jackson dame went out to the kitchen for the beer. Jackson and Mitch sat down and Mitch said, "How come you're not working? Yard closed up?"

"Too worried about the kid to bother with business," Jackson said. "I been sitting here and stewing around, wondering what happened to him."

"Must have been tough," Mitch said. But if the guy had been worried, why hadn't he gone up to headquarters instead of sending his wife?

"What was the idea of you grabbing him?" Jackson asked.

Mitch shrugged off the question with the gesture of a guy who had nothing but innocence inside him. "He was lost," Mitch said. "I felt sorry for the little fella."

"How'd you get along with him?" Jackson asked.

"Okay."

"I mean, did he talk much? Kids are funny sometimes. What did he say?"

"A little of this and a little of that," Mitch said, and he began to understand. Jackson was worried whether the kid had given something away—so worried that he had to find out.

The guy made some remark about the weather and about the neighborhood, and Mitch asked Jackson how long he'd lived here and Jackson switched the subject without answering direct. And all the time Mitch's mind was churning, trying to figure out the real reason Jackson had phoned for him. Besides wanting to know if the kid had said anything, Jackson hoped Mitch would go back and say the Jacksons were nice normal people, that they had nothing to hide, had even invited Mitch in and given him a beer.

Which meant they weren't normal and had plenty to hide.

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Then it hit Mitch with a jolt that they were covering up—covering up for Rogan.

The kid was Rogan's, and Rogan wasn't far away. He'd come back for the loot. Jackson was a stand-in for him and was putting on an act to fool the police, and maybe the dame was Rogan's wife and maybe she wasn't, but sure as hell Jackson wasn't the kid's father. So if Mitch could slip in a question to show it one way or the other, he'd be on first base, anyhow.

He leaned back in his chair, as if he had nothing in mind except a little small talk. "That kid of yours," he said. "He go to school?"

"Sure. What about it?"

"I was wondering what grade he's in."

"What do you think?" Jackson snapped. Obviously the subject was a touchy one and he forgot about being polite. "He's six years old. Think he's in high school?"

"Naah," Mitch said. "I thought he was in college, maybe."

Jackson picked up the toy gun and kind of hefted it, balancing it and fingering it as if he were plenty used to guns. "You got a real sense of humor," he said.

"Yeah," Mitch said. "What school's he in?"

"Public school," Jackson said, spitting the words out.

"Sure. Which one?"

It was the key question. Any father knew what school his kid went to. So if the kid was Jackson's and everything was on the up-and-up, he'd rattle it off without even thinking. But if he couldn't, then Mitch was right all the way.

Jackson turned around and called out to the kitchen. "Hey, Betty—our friend wants to know what school Junior goes to."

She came out of the kitchen to answer. "P.S. Forty-five," she said. "And we don't have any beer."

"That's okay," Mitch said. He looked at his watch and stood up. "Time for me to blow, anyhow." And he left.

But outside, sitting in the car, he saw he had a problem.

He couldn't let this ride—not when there was a chance he had a lead on a cop killer. On the other hand, if Mitch told the lieutenant that this was nothing but a theory on Mitch's part, the lieutenant would either laugh it off or else tell Mitch to stay with it until he got something—which meant goodbye tomorrow.

So Mitch was hooked, and he knew it. His only hope was that Jub would dig up something at the junk yard that would blow the case wide open today . . . or else that Jackson would scare and lead the way straight to Rogan.

Mitch started the car, drove to the corner, and parked on the side street where he had a full view of the Jackson house.

Mitch waited about ten minutes, and then he saw Jackson come out and get in the new car, nose it out

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the driveway, and head up the street, past Mitch. Mitch followed, staying maybe fifty feet behind and letting himself be seen. After a couple of blocks Jackson pulled up at the curb and got out of his car. Mitch stopped directly behind and waited for Jackson to step alongside.

"What's the big idea?" Jackson said. Being polite hadn't worked; it hadn't fooled Mitch, so Jackson was going to be nasty again. "You tailin' me?" he demanded.

Mitch shrugged. "Maybe."

"What for?"

"You guess."

"Look, copper—I got a right to go where I want to."

"Sure," Mitch said. "Anybody stopping you?"

"Just lay off. Turn around and beat it."

Mitch tapped his hand on the steering wheel, and Jackson had sense enough to see there was nothing he could do.

"Okay," the big guy mumbled. "Meet me in my office, we can talk there. I'll be waiting inside." And Jackson wheeled, marched back to his car, and took off. Mitch stayed behind, still at a fifty-foot distance.

It didn't take much brain power to dope things out. Rogan was hiding in the office, and when Mitch stepped inside, they'd gun him down and take their chances. Because the way things stood, what did they have to lose?

Jackson kept going, nice and easy, and Mitch kept tagging along behind. He'd find Jub at the yard and pick him up. And what to do then was a tricky business. They couldn't take the chance of going into that shack, they had no grounds for an arrest, and at the same time they couldn't just kiss the thing off and go home.

If it wasn't for that vacation of Mitch's, he'd have hung around and kept an eye on Jackson while Lieutenant Decker ordered an investigation. At the school, from neighbors. Check Mrs. Jackson, check the files. And after a while they'd know. Except that Mitch was planning to go up to the lake tomorrow, and how could you tell how long an investigation like that would take?

So he rolled along and tried to cook up an angle. And all he drew was a blank.

The road was deserted out here, a long stretch with the marsh on one side and the junk yard and its wrecked cars strung along the other. Jub's police car—its insignia plainly marked—was parked on the macadam, and a couple of hundred feet away Jub was hard at work. He had a crowbar and was forcing open the trunk of a car—a Chevy.

What happened next took Mitch by surprise.

He was expecting Jackson to turn into the dirt road that led to the office-shack, but the guy went right on past, still going slow. Maybe he expected Mitch to stop and talk to Jub, but Mitch didn't. Mitch gave a blast on his horn, blinked his lights,

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then touched the siren button to attract Jub's attention. When Jub turned around, Mitch waved for him to come over.

Jackson reacted to that siren as if he were wired for sound. His car seemed to jerk and leap forward, and he had a hundred-yard lead by the time Mitch realized it.

Mitch gave his car the gun, locked the siren button in the On position, and picked up his radio phone. He spoke crisply.

"Signal Nine-Nine," he said. "Gray Mercury going west on Lincoln." Then he slapped the phone back in its cradle and concentrated on driving. Signal Nine-Nine would bring out every radio car and every State Trooper on patrol, and Lincoln Avenue would be blocked off. But how soon?

Mitch, with the wail of the siren and the roar of air and the scream of tires in his ears, drove like a speed demon. Four miles to the turnpike. Jackson would cover it in three minutes maybe. Three minutes wasn't long enough to mobilize and set up a road block, and Mitch had to hang on until help arrived.

Jackson, with that head-start he'd got by speeding up first, was now a couple of hundred yards ahead, and gaining. He swung out to the left abruptly, whizzed past a green car, then careered back to the right. Mitch saw a truck coming toward him, filling the opposite lane.

Mitch realized immediately that he was in a helpless position. Braking easy wouldn't do any good, and braking hard would probably throw him into a skid—and he'd lose Jackson, besides. So the green car ahead of him or the truck coming toward him had to save his hide—but what the hell was the matter with them? They could see him, they could hear his siren. Didn't they know they were supposed to pull over and give a cop room?

He gritted his teeth, thought of Amy, of Jackson, of the lake, of everything, of nothing. A green car and a truck, a couple of damn fools who'd lost their heads or didn't know the rules. Mitch tensed; maybe he prayed and maybe he didn't. He had no idea. And then the green car ahead of him started doing tricks, in slow motion.

The tail lights went red, the turning signal blinked, but for a left turn. The guy at the wheel was rattled and doing everything wrong. The left blinker went off and the right blinker came on. Mitch was practically on top of the car when the driver finally edged over to the right and slipped onto the shoulder of the road.

Mitch whizzed by, but he never knew how he made it. He felt the sweat pouring down into his eyes and he wanted to wipe it off. But his hands wouldn't move, they were locked tight on the wheel. Up ahead Jackson was still gaining.

Mitch came out of it slow, and in a funny way he was able to relax a little, to think, to move his fingers

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again. He brushed off the sweat, decided the hell with this, he'd slow down, save his own life, and let the other boys close in on Jackson. The guy was trapped, wasn't he?

Then Mitch saw the turnpike overpass ahead, saw Jackson's brake lights flash on. Jackson's car seemed to sway, flutter, almost go off the road as it careered into the approach to the turnpike.

Mitch applied his brakes gradually. He didn't want to go shooting into turnpike traffic at eighty—or at sixty or forty, either. And once Jackson was out there, the State Troopers could worry. Mitch didn't even have jurisdiction.

Above the dull roar of wind and tires Mitch heard the crash. He had a sick, empty feeling in the pit of his stomach, and he hoped nobody else was involved in the smash-up. He slowed up, and he was doing a modest thirty when he sighted the smoldering wreckage where Jackson had rammed almost head-on into a retaining wall . . .

Mitch got home around seven. Amy was giving the kids supper, and the hallway of the apartment was jammed with suitcases and bundles. Amy came flying into his arms as he opened the door.

"Mitchell," she said, holding on tight, "I was getting worried. I couldn't imagine what kept you so late."

"We got that bank robber," he said. "Jub found the loot in an old car in the junk yard, and the guy killed himself trying to get away."

"Rogan?" she said.

Mitch shook his head. "Naah. That's what we thought at first. But this bank teller had Rogan on the brain, like lots of other people did. I don't want to blame the guy for making a mistake."

"Of course not," Amy said.

"Well, when somebody held up that bank, the teller thought he recognized Rogan. Only Rogan had nothing to do with it. We just got word they nabbed him out west."

"Then who did it?"

"Guy named Jackson. We caught up with him this afternoon. He got rattled when he was followed and when he saw Jub searching cars for the money. He knew we were closing in, so he tried a getaway and ran into a stone wall."

"Well, you can tell me all about it later. Do you know you forgot to write that note to Joey's school? The one the PTA wants everybody to send, asking for better lunches. I promised you'd write. As a policeman, what you say carries weight."

"Sure," he said. "I'll take care of it right away. Amy, does Joey look like me?"

She laughed at the question. "Sometimes," she said. "Some people think so and others don't. Why?"

"Nothing," he said. "I better go write that note. Only — look, Amy, what's the name of the school? I mean, what's the number?"

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a new story by

HENRY SLESAR

EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: HENRY SLESAR

TITLE: *The Return of the Moresbys*

TYPE: Murder Story

LOCALE: United States

TIME: The Past, the Present, and the Future

COMMENTS: *When his beloved wife became interested in metempsychosis, the man with the pale blue eyes really didn't mind; but when transmigration of souls threatened his future security . . .*

ONE DROP OF BLUE DYE IN A gallon of water would have made the precise color of Moresby's eyes. Framed by the white bandages, their hue was only slightly more intense, and as the hospital hours passed, the blue faded, faded, in an eerie synchronization with his ebbing life.

Three hours before Moresby's end came, there was a burst of stubborn vitality in the dying man, a sudden spell of clarity, and a desire to talk. The interns would have restrained him, except for one word that Moresby used. It was the word "murder."

That word made Moresby's fate a police matter, and a lieutenant named Gardner was summoned to the bedside. He was the last man Moresby spoke to on earth, and he could have done worse. Lieutenant Gardner was a good listener . . .

I like Southern California (Moresby began). I was born in Vermont and never knew the time I was warm enough. I came west when I was twenty, and soon discovered that sunlit indolence was the only way of life that I truly enjoyed. I lived on beaches. I became bronzed and muscular, a superb swimmer, an incorrigible loafer.

It was on a beach in Southern

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California that I met Una, the white-skinned, bony, bountiful woman who would become my beloved, my wife—and the support of my lazy sunshine hours.

Our honeymoon lasted a whole year—on the beaches of the Caribbean and the French Riviera. Una got freckled. Finally we returned to our home in Los Angeles and settled down to a quiet, companionable marriage. Una's financial resources were without end, and so was her ingenuousness. I took advantage of neither. I was not a spendthrift, nor an unfaithful husband. I was too intelligent to spoil a lifelong holiday because of petty indulgences.

No, it was Una who spoiled it—Una in search of an anchor. For some people, money would have been anchor enough. But Una had been born to her wealth, and felt the need of something more. For a time, marriage supplied this. Then she made a pitiful attempt at Art—with a capital A. It was laughable. Then she tried a career. That too failed. Then she tried religion. It bored her.

Most religion, that is. But finally she discovered the amusing variety that abounds in Southern California. She met Dr. Archibald Sing, the high priest of the Temple of Metempsychosis.

Una was not a brilliant woman, but neither was she a complete fool. There was a case for Dr. Sing. He was an eye-stopping man, tall as a tower and hugely shouldered, cleverly bearded for an effect of wisdom and youth combined. He avoided the usual pretensions of esoteric cults, and maintained a simple meeting place of almost monastic restraint. He wore well-tailored everyday clothes, delivered his sermons in conversational English, and conducted his services without incense, idols, or theatrics. But he preached a doctrine intensely interesting to poor Una—a doctrine of eternal life and the love of small animals.

Una first visited the Temple in the company of a cocktail companion. On her second visit she insisted that I come along. I was ironically hostile to the whole thing, of course, but I still remember Dr. Sing's little speech.

"The soul is immortal," he said. "The soul cannot die. The soul, upon leaving the body, must make its passage elsewhere. The science of eschatology—dealing with the last four things of death, judgment, heaven, and hell—is the most ancient of all sciences, and from its wisdom has come the inescapable certainty of the transmigration of souls.

"And where does it go? The soul, according to all the wise men of past generations, departs from the mouth of the dying, and is consequently a small thing, given to seeking a home in the body of a small thing. A bird, a snake, a mouse; a dove or a hawk; a dog, a

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cat, an insect. For these small creations of God are empty vessels, placed on Earth to house the departing souls of humanity, so they need not wander forever in a trackless eternity."

Pure rot, of course, and the fact that Una didn't immediately recognize it as such was the most surprising thing I ever learned about my wife. The second surprising thing was the amount of devotion she gave to Dr. Sing and his gospel. The third surprising thing was the money.

To be honest, I really didn't mind Una taking up a faith. After all, the transmigration of souls has had quite a few adherents in the history of gullible man and is no sillier a concept than I've heard expressed in more Westernized religions. If she wanted to end up as a homing pigeon instead of an angel, that was strictly her business, and I made no attempt to interfere. But the money. That was different. Damn it, how that money went out!

Most of it, of course, went to the Temple. Dr. Archibald Sing had the deepest collection plate in the spiritual kingdom, and Una seemed determined to keep it filled. Thousands more went as donations to various institutions for the care and comfort of cats, dogs, and birds. Una had always been fond of furry, romping, and flying things, but now she had an additional incentive: she was Preventing Cruelty to Souls. Fortunately, there was no Home for Underprivileged Insects, or she would have given money to that too.

Then came the final blow. I learned that Una had decided to further Dr. Sing's good work by a gesture that would prove her absolute faith in his mission. She was altering her will to leave the bulk of her fortune to the Temple.

Her announcement one Friday of this intent was the cause of our first real quarrel. I told her in detail what I thought of Dr. Archibald Sing. I also made some candid remarks on her belief in transmigration. The truth is, I was very rude.

She cried a great deal, and the very next morning she made a Monday appointment with her attorney. This gave me one week-end to move around in. It's amazing how fast one can think—when Necessity is in the driver's seat.

On Saturday night I overdosed her milk with sleeping powders, and then put on an enormous pot of coffee with which I would attempt to wake her. The coffee wasn't perking yet when the police arrived and found her dead. They were most sympathetic.

At the inquest the testimony concerning Una's preoccupation with a Religion of Death was considered meaningful. The verdict was suicide.

But I should mention one more thing about that fateful night. Una did not die immediately. She fell into a state halfway between sleep and wakefulness, and she knew what I had done to her and why. In a

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terrible voice that I can summon all too easily to recollection, she swore revenge. It was mere raving, of course, but Una had a special reason for believing in vengeance from beyond the grave.

"I'll come back, Richard," she said. "You'll see. I'll come back just as Dr. Sing says . . ."

Well, I had never liked animals much. Fangs, claws, wings, and tails had little attraction for me. As a matter of fact, I had always been slightly fearful of dogs, and the word had spread among the canine population. They say it's olfactory; perhaps it is. At any rate, I didn't take Una's threat seriously. I was not a convert to Dr. Sing's belief in metempsychosis, and when that gentleman came to pay me a dutiful condolence call, and spoke solemnly of Una's transported soul, I could not resist an open snicker.

By sheer coincidence I was chased by a mongrel on the very day of Una's interment. One of those things. I was driving home from the funeral, and this belligerant cur decided to bark at the tires of my Ferrari. I would have gladly run the creature over, but a smudgy-mouthed lad came along and cradled it in his arms.

"Sorry, mister," he said. "He always barks at foreign cars."

"Patriotic little beast, isn't he?" I snarled.

That night I had terrible nightmares.

Two days later some sort of shiny-winged bird, an immense thing that might have been a pheasant, slammed against the picture window of my living room. I jumped out of my chair with a start, spilling the Balkan Sobranie out of my pipe. It was really nothing new—birds sometimes hit that window, mistaking it for open highway; usually, they dashed their brains out and that was that. This beggar was only stunned.

It lay on the patio tiles, feebly flapping its damned glossy wings. I have to admit I was terrified. I ran upstairs and called the game warden, a beefy, unimaginative man who laughed at my discomfort and ultimately removed the bird from the premises. He said something about dinner. Ugh! What if it *had* been Una? Cannibal!

That night there was a fly in my library—a big buzzing bluebottle of a fly. It was still early in spring, and that fly was surely ahead of its flight schedule. When it swooped into my vicinity, I swatted at it mightily with a copy of *Fortune* and it brushed my forehead. The touch of the thing was so revolting that I actually screamed the name of my dead wife.

You can see the state I was in. I finally got the thing with a bug bomb.

I felt a little better the next day. I went to the beach and lay under the loving warmth of the sun and forgot about Una and her deathbed promise. I lay there and listened

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to the swish-swash of the tide, the comforting sound of distant laughter, the shrill cries of the gulls.

The gulls.

The sharp beaks. Swooping creatures, diving for prey. Stabbing, pecking, tearing . . . I thought of Prometheus and his liver.

The sun turned suddenly cold. I left the beach hastily and went to have dinner at a pleasant club I knew. When I left, I discovered a lunar moth as big as a child's fist on my rear window. I was driving when it flew off and fluttered around the car's interior, and that was when I had my accident.

Only a minor one—I skidded over a curb, knocking down a newspaper boy. My ribs were bruised and my fender crumpled. Small damage, but enough, so I decided it was time to have a little chat with Dr. Archibald Sing. Not that I believed, you understand. But he was a doctor in a way, wasn't he?

When I told him of my experiences he was greatly reassuring.

"Come now," he smiled. "Do you think so little of your poor departed wife as to suspect her of such petty malice? Why should Una torment you?"

"Well, we had our little disagreements," I said.

"And besides, do you really think Una would be transmigrated into the forms you mention? No, no, Mr. Moresby, the process is surely not so random or so cruel."

"No?" I said.

"Certainly not. It is my sincere belief that our souls are weighed and judged by Higher Powers before the transformation takes place, and each of us is given the vessel which best conforms to the human personality we have left behind. Una a car-chasing dog? Never. A bird, perhaps —but not an ungainly pheasant. A fly, a gull, a moth? No, Mr. Moresby, you may take my word for it. That soft, gentle woman would never be so unjustly rewarded in her after-life. These encounters of yours are pure coincidences."

"Well," I sighed, "I thought as much myself. But in your opinion—if Una did come back—what sort of animal *would* she be?"

"You know your wife best," Dr. Sing smiled.

That night I heard the noise in the cellar.

I was not accustomed to paying attention to house sounds. The bang of a shutter, the clank of a pipe, the knock of the furnace—these rarely bothered me. But this soft padded sound, coming at a time of such highly nervous agitation, was irritating. I simply had to investigate its source.

I tiptoed down the cellar steps and found the lighting system—one stark bulb—insufficient for a thorough search. I got a flashlight and probed the shadows. In the beginning I had no success. Whatever had caused the noise—a mouse?—was frozen into inactivity because of my investigation.

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I flicked off the light, held my breath, and waited. My strategy was rewarded. An empty oil can toppled over, and my flashlight beam picked out the culprit. A mouse? No, a cat.

I don't like cats—never have. They're skulking, cynical, malicious creatures. This alley denizen, its white fur shaggy, its eyes baleful in the spotlight, was monstrously big and yet strangely bony and fleshless. Like all cats, it had iridescent pupils that stared with a curious mixture of fear, hostility, and resentment.

"Scat!" I said.

It didn't scat. It made a soft mewling sound and then came toward me. *Toward* me.

"Una," I said.

I made a cowardly dash for the cellar door. It stuck for one hideous moment, then yielded to pressure.

Once I had reached the other side of the door, I remembered the hunting rifle that Una had given me for Christmas, thinking it would remind me of Vermontian pleasures. It stood unused in an upstairs closet. I found it, loaded it, and brought it back to the cellar.

I hadn't fired a rifle since boyhood. But I stood on the top step of the cellar stairway, and when my flashlight beam picked out the ghostly white feline haunching in a corner, I put down the light, raised the weapon, and squeezed the trigger, aiming blindly.

The report was deafening, but the recoil was worse. My precarious balance on the top step was lost, and I fell backward, crashing through the flimsy railing and dropping ten feet to the concrete floor.

When I tried to lift myself, the pain in my right leg was agonizing. I had fractured or broken a bone, and I was unable to move. There was a heavy mist of plaster in the room, and when it cleared I saw just how bad my aim had been. The cat was still alive, and it was regarding me at this new level, its body sprinkled with plaster dust, its eyes now filled with hatred.

I can't describe the gruesome thoughts that raced through my mind, or what exaggerations of horror troubled my brain. I began to crawl toward the fallen rifle, gasping with pain. My fingers touched the barrel. I looked backward at my adversary, and saw it advancing toward me.

"Una!" I screamed, and strained to retrieve the rifle. My fingers closed on the center of the weapon and I pulled it toward me, grasping too quickly in my panic.

My fingers were on the trigger; the rifle went off again, and the bullet struck me in the chest . . .

The faded blue eyes dimmed once more. The lips paled, and closed. The hands, twitching over the sheets, became still.

"Enough for now," the intern said.

Lieutenant Gardner agreed. He stood up.

"Was it worth anything?"

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"Something," Gardner said. "He confessed to killing his wife. Think he can manage to sign a statement?"

"Not likely," the intern said.

An hour later Moresby died.

The following morning Lieutenant Gardner drove out to the Moresby home. It was a brilliant, sunshiny day, perfect for the beach. He thought of Moresby.

He spoke briefly to the uniformed patrolman who had been posted the previous night at the scene of the tragedy. The officer reported a quiet night.

"Think I'll take a look at that cellar," the Lieutenant said.

Nothing had been touched. The flashlight was still on the top step. There was a gaping hole in the corner where the bullet had shattered the plaster. The floor showed white dust, except for the grim area where Moresby had fallen.

There was one window in the cellar—a narrow one at the top of the long wall, permitting a thin rectangle of sunlight to enter the room. The window was open, and a faint breeze stirred dust motes.

Lieutenant Gardner went upstairs and the patrolman offered him a cup of coffee.

"Pretty sad," the officer said. "Two deaths in less than a month. Happens that way sometimes."

"It happens," the Lieutenant agreed. "When you were here last night, did you see any sign of a cat in the basement?"

"A cat? No, sir, nothing like that."

A moment later Lieutenant Gardner lowered his cup.

"Did you hear something?"

"No."

"Sort of a scratching noise?"

He went to the cellar door and opened it.

"I hear it now," the cop said. "Should we take a look, sir?"

The Lieutenant went into the cellar, the officer behind him.

"For the love of Mike," the patrolman chuckled. "Take a look at that."

In the center of the basement the great shaggy white cat sputtered at them, dropping the squirming object in its mouth. Its outspread claw pinned it again, replaced it between eager jaws, and the cat dined.

When its hasty meal was over, the cat bounded from one packing case to another until it reached the open window. Then it was gone, with one quick backward glance at its audience, a look composed of satiety and triumph.

"There goes your cat," the officer said. "We almost interrupted its dinner."

"Never mind that," Lieutenant Gardner said. "Did you see its eyes—the rat's eyes?"

"Eyes?"

"Yes, its eyes!" the Lieutenant said. "Maybe I'm nuts, but they were blue. Did you ever see a rat with pale blue eyes?"

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR: *Gretchen Travis comes from Omaha, Nebraska, where at various times she sold picture frames in a department store, clothes in a college shop, and worked as a reporter on the Omaha 'World-Herald.' She was in Sicily and Italy during World War II as an American Red Cross worker, sailed home on V-E Day, and went abroad again with the UNRRA Displaced Persons Operation in Germany as a member of its Public Information section. At the time of writing this thumbnail biography, she is a housewife-author, living in northern Westchester with a husband, two children, and the usual cat and dog. During the last few years she has been co-author of three mystery books and this past spring she had one of her own published*—SHE FELL AMONG THIEVES, *Crime Club, Doubleday. "Hunting Accident" is her first short story—and we hope to bring you more . . .*

HUNTING ACCIDENT

by GRETCHEN TRAVIS

NOISE STILL BOTHERED LAURA White. Right now she was trying hard not to listen to the steady whirring noise the car wheels made as they rolled along the turnpike. And the harder she tried, the louder the wheels sounded.

She looked out the window and concentrated on the foliage—gaudy reds and yellows and oranges. The vivid colors made her think of the tropics. Suddenly she wished she were going to lie on some beach, to feel the warm sand underneath her cheek and the hot sun baking her back, to store up warmness for use as needed. She hadn't wanted to come north. But this was the only vacation Horace would take.

She bit her lip. If she started crying now, she knew she couldn't stop. And then it would begin all over again. The terrible concern on Horace's face—the sanitarium—the brisk cheerful nurses—the little guarded notes from her friends. She sat up as straight as she could and stared ahead.

Horace took his hand from the wheel long enough to pat her knee. "All right, hon? We'll be there soon."

He referred to Augusta, Maine, where they would spend the night before driving farther north to the town where he hunted a few days each fall. This year he would have skipped his trip and stayed in the city with her if Dr. Phillips hadn't suggested that a change of scene might do Laura good.

Laura forced herself to show some

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interest. "It's beautiful country, isn't it?"

"None better. And wait till you see Coulter. You'll like it, Laura. It's small and peaceful—a real New England town. This is going to be just what the doctor ordered for you."

They stayed overnight in Augusta in a pleasant old-fashioned hotel where Horace had made reservations. He insisted that she sleep late in the morning and eat a leisurely breakfast before they left about noon. There was road construction along the way, and they took a wrong turn at one point, so it was almost dusk when they approached Coulter.

Horace began to mention landmarks. "You can't see it, but there's a fair-sized lake behind those trees." And a little farther on, "Some of the best hunting I ever had was in that backwoods there."

"Who will you hunt with?" Laura asked.

"Oh, there'll be someone. Ed Morton, perhaps—he lives near where we're staying. He's a widower who owns the local drug store and he can generally take a day or two off whenever he wants to. Or I'll hire a guide if I can find one who can stand me." Horace was not a serious hunter. He was a fair shot, but mainly he enjoyed being outdoors. "Or maybe you'll come out with me. You used to enjoy it."

Laura managed a smile. "Not this time, Horace."

He slowed down and then, abruptly, they were in the town.

She began to relax. Coulter's main street brought back childhood memories. There was the drug store and the hardware store with offices above them, the white church with its pointed steeple, the bank and the Town Hall. A combination filling station-garage straddled one corner. The street was nearly deserted, for it was past the supper hour. The few people on the sidewalks moved in an unhurried way, almost like slow motion compared with New York where everyone seemed to be running.

Horace turned into a side street. "Mrs. Purdy's is just a few blocks away now. She'll be holding supper for us," he said reassuringly.

They drove past modest white clapboard houses, each built close to the tree-lined road, and stopped in front of an old square Colonial, larger than its neighbors. Horace got out of the car, picked up their smaller pieces of luggage, telling Laura not to bother with anything, and led the way onto the front porch.

Mrs. Purdy was a plump woman in her late sixties with carefully groomed white hair. She greeted them warmly, joking with Horace. "I'll bet you forgot your way"—directing them upstairs—"the big room at the back, Mr. White. You know . . ."—where a tester bed was turned down and the edges of crisp white sheets were folded over a

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calico comforter. A china pitcher squatted in its matching bowl on a pine commode, and a Windsor rocker stood by a window.

"It's all right, isn't it?" Horace asked anxiously.

"It's perfect. And I'm starved," Laura said, surprised.

The next morning she woke late. Vaguely she recalled Horace tiptoeing heavily about the room, other footsteps on the stairs, and the sound of running water; but for the first time in months noises hadn't bothered her. This was the first natural sleep she'd had in some time. It left her clear-headed and refreshed.

Laura lay quietly, thinking of dinner the night before. Mr. Morton the druggist, taciturn although courteous. Mrs. Purdy who, several times, had been on the verge of mentioning Laura's illness about which Laura was sure Horace had warned her. But each time the landlady skirted the pitfall nimbly, skipping on to local gossip.

Laura drowsed most of the day. She ate lunch from a tray that Mrs. Purdy brought to her room, parried conversational gambits to the elderly woman's obvious disappointment, and was up and had a highball waiting for Horace when he came in. He'd had no luck hunting and, while cheerful as usual, he was tired. Still, he insisted on accompanying her on a short walk after dinner. They went to bed early and fell asleep almost at once.

The following morning Laura took another, longer walk. In the afternoon she evaded Mrs. Purdy, unpacked some books she'd brought, and read in her room.

It was the smell of turnips—a strong aversion Laura retained from her childhood—that prompted her to go out with Horace the third day. As soon as she wakened, she knew there would be New England boiled dinner and that turnips would be one of the ingredients. She told Horace she didn't intend to hunt, merely to walk through the woods with him.

He was worried. "Are you sure you feel up to it, hon? You won't mind if Ed Morton comes along too? He said last night he might join me today. Maybe I'd better put him off. You'll rest if you get tired? Promise?"

In the end the three of them set off, carrying a lunch and heading for the lake area that Horace had pointed out on the way into Coulter. After lunch Ed Morton said he was going to reconnoiter while Laura took the rest that Horace reminded her she'd promised to take.

Ed Morton vanished into the woods, and Horace went back to the car for a blanket to wrap around Laura's legs. They walked across an open space and on down to the lake, and stretched out at the edge of the water. Half an hour later Horace checked the time and got up. He held out his hand to help Laura to her feet.

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"Say, why don't you try your luck?" he suggested. He picked up his hunting rifle and handed it to her. "You can use my gun. It'll be heavy for you, but you won't want to use it long anyway."

"No. No, I don't think so. I'll just follow you," Laura said.

"Oh, go on. I'm not getting anything. Maybe I can brag about your bag."

It had been years since she'd held a gun. She raised it, turned her back to Horace, and sighted across the lake, her finger curled around the trigger. Behind her, Horace spoke.

"On second thought, maybe you'd better not. You might get overtired and spoil the good rest you've been getting so far. Matter of fact, I think I'll find Ed and tell him I'm taking you back to Mrs. Purdy's. He won't mind. He'll probably be glad to get rid of a pair of duffers. Here, give me the gun."

Obediently, Laura swung around. Suddenly there was a loud explosion in her ears. The recoil from the Winchester threw her off balance. Horace and the still-smoking gun dropped to the ground at nearly the same moment. She heard a faint splash in the lake. Horace groaned and clutched his chest. He stared dumbly from the blood on his hand to Laura, who threw herself down beside him.

She screamed. Tears ran down her cheeks. "Oh, my God—my God. Horace, I didn't mean to—it was an accident!"

He patted her hand. "There, I know. I know."

She heard running footsteps. Ed Morton's voice sounded unnaturally loud over her shoulder. "What happened? I heard someone scream. Oh, my God." He glanced once at Laura, stooped and examined Horace briefly, his face grave. "Hoffmann's farm—not far from here," he panted, rising. "I'll go phone for the doctor.

Laura was on her knees, sobbing, and mumbling incoherently. Ed Morton avoided looking at her. Horace's eyes moved from one to the other, resting with anguish on Laura. "Wait, Ed . . . wait." He gathered the last of his strength. "Not what you think," he said faintly. "It wasn't . . . Laura didn't shoot me. Someone else—a stranger—a man."

Ed Morton leaned over him and spoke sharply. "A man? Can you describe him?"

Horace answered haltingly, hushing Laura who was trying to talk. "Big fellow—in red—checked shirt."

Ed's face was questioning. The description fitted half the hunters in the Maine woods.

Horace noticed his expression and embellished further. "Black curly hair." He gasped for breath. "Big crooked . . . nose." He groaned once more. Then his eyes closed and they did not open again.

For the second time Laura screamed. She crouched over Horace

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and put her face in her hands. A moment later she heard other footsteps, felt Ed Morton stand up, and heard him say grimly, "So—another 'accident,' eh, Turner. I wonder how you'll explain this one."

She heard a husky voice answer, "What the hell. Let go of me, Morton."

Laura dropped her hands from her face and looked up. A tall angry man stood opposite them. He wore a red-checked flannel shirt and carried a gun. His face, beneath thick black hair, would have been handsome had it not been marred by its most prominent feature—a large, slightly crooked nose.

Then his face grew dimmer and dimmer until it disappeared entirely . . .

When Laura came to, Mrs. Purdy was sitting in the Windsor rocker by the bed. Laura felt groggy, hazily aware that she'd been given a sedative and that someone had removed her clothes and tucked blankets around her. She stirred painfully, her head throbbing.

"Are you awake now, dear? You poor thing." The last three words were whispered. "Don't try to talk. It's a terrible, terrible tragedy for you, that's what it is. At least *he* won't go scot-free again. Caught red-handed he was, and there's not a soul in Coulter but won't be glad to see him pay for it."

"What—who are you talking about, Mrs. Purdy?"

"Why, Burton Turner, of course. The man that shot your husband. Mr. High-and-Mighty Turner himself. It's just an act of God that Ed Morton was there to catch him. Otherwise you'd have been—" Mrs. Purdy stopped short.

"Catch who?" Laura tried to fight her way back to reality. Then she remembered. "No. No." She was almost shouting. "You're making a mistake—a big mistake. It was I who shot Horace. I was holding the gun and—and it went off. Why would he, this Mr. Turner, want to shoot Horace?"

"Well. I declare." Mrs. Purdy's look of pity changed to outrage. "Your own husband told Ed who shot him and he described Burton Turner to a T, and Ed Morton's no liar. It's Mr. Burton Turner who's lying, and all his smooth talk won't get him out of jail this time."

"Jail? He's in jail? Mrs. Purdy, I must talk to the police right away! Horace was only trying to protect me. That's why he said someone else shot him. It's all a dreadful mistake." Laura began to cry.

Mrs. Purdy got up, leaving the rocker lurching in her wake. "There now. Dr. Payne said for me to call him soon's you came to."

"Yes, please call him, please," Laura said.

Dr. Payne came at once. He was a contemporary of Mrs. Purdy's and they even looked alike, Laura thought. While he took her pulse, she told him what had happened

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and explained Horace's last protective act.

He didn't answer right away. "You've had quite a shock, Mrs. White," he said finally, his examination completed. "Also—I think I'd better tell you—I have your medical record."

Of course. Horace, with his usual thoroughness, would have had Dr. Phillips send it up. Laura struggled to a sitting position. "My health has nothing to do with this."

"I think your health has quite a lot to do with what you *believe* happened, Mrs. White," he said gravely. "A nervous breakdown can be a very tricky thing."

"Dr. Payne, I shot Horace. Don't you understand? *I* shot him. Not this poor man, Burton Turner, whoever he is."

The doctor's bland bedside face grew harsh. "Burton Turner *is* a thoroughly unpleasant and heartily disliked man. By rights he should have been in prison long ago. Don't waste a moment's sympathy on him."

"I don't care what he *has* done. He shouldn't be blamed now for something that's all my fault." She could see that she was making no impression. "I want to talk to the police."

"Mrs. White," he said, "when our strength is low we sometimes develop a temporary hatred for those who are well and strong—even those nearest and dearest to us. Right now you may think you killed your husband because once or twice it may have been a subconscious wish. But when you feel better, you'll know you didn't. Now then. I'm going to leave you another sedative. Directions are on the bottle."

He closed the door gently behind him.

As soon as Dr. Payne left, Laura swung her legs over the side of the bed, tried to stand up, and swayed back onto the pillows. She was furious at her weakness. She comforted herself by imagining what fools they'd look in the morning, and then, against her will, she drowsed off again.

The next morning she was still shaky but she managed to dress and walk downstairs.

Mrs. Purdy came bustling out of the kitchen. "Why, Mrs. White, you shouldn't be up," she said reproachfully. "Dr. Payne said you was weak as a newborn kitten and ought to stay in bed. You go right back upstairs and I'll fix you a nice tray."

"Thank you," Laura said. "But there's too much to do. I'll have to make some arrangements about—about Horace." Her eyes filled with tears.

"Now there, you poor child. I'll help all I can," Mrs. Purdy said. "First let me put your breakfast on the table. You ought to eat something."

"First, what is the telephone number of your police station?" Laura asked. "Before I do anything

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I must tell them that I was responsible for Horace's death—so that this Mr. Turner can be released at once."

Mrs. Purdy's lips tightened. "It's in the phone book"—and without another word she turned and marched back into the kitchen.

Laura put on her coat and walked into town. She stopped a woman on the street, asked for the police station, and was directed to the Sheriff's office.

Laura found the office without much trouble and introduced herself to the Sheriff, a burly man who called her "little lady" and who took charge of the conversation immediately. With heavy-handed gravity he regretted her husband's unfortunate death, said that justice would be done, and added that while she might have to return for the trial, there was no reason she could not leave Coulter as soon as she liked.

When she could finally interrupt, Laura said, "I'm afraid you don't understand the situation at all. You see, I shot Horace." She told her story concisely—how she happened to have the gun in her hands, how it went off accidentally, and what she knew Horace had in mind when he invented "a stranger." "So you see," she said, "you've got the wrong person. I don't know what you'll want to do with me, but you *must* let Burton Turner go and I'd like to tell him how sorry I am."

She felt immensely relieved as soon as she had finished, in spite of any unpleasantness that might lie ahead for her. But she was totally unprepared for what the Sheriff said next.

"Sorry? Sorry for the man that killed your husband?" he said, his mouth opening in surprise and exposing tobacco-stained teeth.

"But he didn't," Laura said with growing panic. "That's what I've just told you."

The Sheriff's eyes narrowed. "I don't know what you're trying to prove, Mrs. White. All I know is what your own husband said and there's Ed Morton to prove he said it. I think you're—" He stopped short of the word Laura knew he meant to use—crazy. "You go talk to Ed Morton," he finished lamely.

"Yes. Yes, of course," Laura said. "That's just what I'll do."

She found herself running to the drug store. Ed Morton was behind the prescription counter. He saw her and came out and put his hand under her arm, leading her into his office at the back of the store. Words of sympathy came hard to him and he showed it.

Touched, Laura thanked him, then plunged into a recital of her visit to the Sheriff and said, "You see, Mr. Morton, you misunderstood Horace entirely. Horace realized that you knew I'd shot him and to save me from disgrace and humiliation, he made up a stranger. Horace never expected that you'd find the man he described because there wasn't anyone. No one at all. I shot Horace."

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Ed Morton gave a dry little cough. "Mrs. White, I heard what your husband said with my own ears. You forget—I was right there. Horace White knew he was dying. A dying man doesn't lie."

"I told you! He lied for my sake. Horace was like that."

"Well, now, I wouldn't say he'd go that far. He's been staying at Mrs. Purdy's for a good number of years and I wouldn't say he was a fanciful man. He wouldn't describe somebody he'd never seen. 'Specially when he knew his end was near."

Laura took a deep breath and changed her tactics. "Mr. Morton, who is this Burton Turner?"

The druggist pressed his fingertips together and started to talk. Laura wondered how she'd ever thought of him as a taciturn man. "No one knows exactly who he is, but folks have their suspicions. He came to Coulter about ten years ago from the city, and he bought the old Breckenridge estate. You won't believe it, but not one person from Coulter has ever been allowed to step foot inside that house since Turner bought it. Nor on his property either, if he knew about it, though plenty of folks have. He even does his trading somewhere else—not here in Coulter."

"But that doesn't make him a criminal," Laura said.

Ed Morton went on. "Then near two years ago a girl, a Coulter girl, was found dead on his property—up near his house. He said he'd never seen her, but we all knew he was lying. He knew her all right. Claimed he was out of town the night she was shot. Even had some alibi rigged up. He was tried, but there wasn't any proof and they had to let him go."

"How can you be so sure he knew her?" Laura asked. She thought, he's going to say where there's smoke, there's fire.

He did.

"But maybe he was telling the truth," Laura protested, trying to keep her voice from rising. "Maybe this girl was meeting someone else and there was a lover's quarrel. Couldn't it be pure coincidence that she was found on his property? Just as it was pure coincidence that made Horace describe a man who looked like Mr. Turner?"

Ed Morton leaned toward her and shook a finger in front of her face. "Then why did Burton Turner just happen to be on the spot when your husband was shot? That wasn't any coincidence. And I'll tell you why. Because you and your husband were trespassing when you went down by the lake. And he followed you to take a pot shot and scare you off, same's he's done time and again to anybody he found on his land. Ask Johnny Projanski. He'll tell you—he'll show you the scar where Burton Turner winged him. Only this time Mister Turner's aim wasn't so steady." There was a moment's silence. Ed Morton stood up. "Of

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course, Mrs. White, this is a bad situation for you—particularly when you haven't been well," he added.

Laura got up and walked stiffly through the drug store back to the street. She was trembling so hard she was afraid she would faint, but she made herself eat lunch, noticing that everyone in the diner looked embarrassed when she sat down on a stool and gave her order. A ter a few bites she pushed her plate away, paid her bill, and, somehow, made it back to Mrs. Purdy's.

Mrs. Purdy was waiting for her. "I'll be out tonight, Mrs. White," she said. "At the church. But I'll leave your supper for you."

"Thank you," Laura said, barely listening.

"And I was just wondering—how long do you plan to stay on? I've—uh—I've got a party of hunters coming, and—"

"I understand," Laura said. "I'll leave as quickly as I can."

"They're coming tomorrow night," Mrs. Purdy said.

Laura slept scarcely at all. She tossed and turned restlessly, alternating between disbelief and rage and fright. Again, the next day, she walked into town.

The lawyer's office was above the hardware store. His name was neatly marked in gold letters on the outside window facing the street and on the door that Laura opened to keep her appointment with him. He was a small clean man, who looked as if he had been left out in the sun to dry.

He stared at her after he'd listened to her story. "If I may say so without offense, Mrs. White, I know your health has been poor. I would advise you to go on home and leave this to the proper authorities."

"I can't convince any of you, can I?" she cried. "Why do you all hate Burton Turner? Because he comes from the city? Because he bought a place in your town and wants to live in it by himself? You're all so eaten up with hatred for this man that you're willing to believe he'd do anything—even kill a girl he says he never knew."

"There was circumstantial evidence—"

"You couldn't prove it though, could you?" Laura said. She lowered her voice. "Tell me, will you please, what penalty is he likely to get?"

The lawyer shrugged. "I understand that in view of past complaints made against him the charge will be murder. He had been warned before."

Laura felt sick with fear and with —something worse—impotence. "You can't. It's so unfair. He's innocent, I tell you—innocent!" She tried to get a grip on herself. "Then I'm going to do the only thing left for me to do—bring a lawyer up from the city."

"By all means bring a lawyer up from New York if you want to," he said. "Although you know, of course, that Burton Turner has means to engage his own. Frankly,

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Mrs. White, I don't understand your motives. I'd have thought you'd be glad that Ed Morton was there and that you had a witness to save you from the inevitable conclusion people would have jumped to. And," he added, "to save you the inevitable notoriety. Think of the newspapers—"

"That's exactly what Horace was thinking of," she cried.

He got up from behind his desk. "I'll tell you one thing, Mrs. White. I hope I'm asked to serve as attorney for the prosecution."

Back at Mrs. Purdy's for the last time, Laura packed the bags she and Horace had brought and carried them downstairs into the hall. The keys to the car rattled in her hand. She wasn't sure that she was strong enough to drive back to the city. She wasn't sure that a New York lawyer would be able to save Burton Turner. She only knew that she felt as if she were standing behind a locked door that would never be opened again.

She put the bags in the car and drove off, retracing the route taken not many days before.

At the edge of town she braked suddenly, turned around, and drew over to the curb in front of the Sheriff's office. He was in, although she knew he'd rather have been any other place as soon as he saw who his visitor was.

This time she wasted no words on amenities. "There are a few things I forgot to ask you," she said. "Did you find the bullet that killed my husband? Bullets can be identified, can't they?"

He was as terse as she. "This one went into the lake. Only place for it to go. It went clean through your husband, excuse me."

She remembered the faint splash that had followed the shot. "My fingerprints are on the gun. Did you check that?"

He snorted. "Why wouldn't they be? You were holding it, weren't you?"

"Well, couldn't a ballistics expert tell whether the bullet was fired from Burton Turner's gun or from my husband's?" she demanded. "Had Mr. Turner's gun been fired? What make was it?"

"It's a Winchester and it'd been fired all right," he said. "Look, Mrs. White, I don't need you to tell me how to run my business. And I haven't heard Burton Turner asking for any ballistics report."

"Could I see him again?" she asked.

"Turner? Why, sure. If he's willing to see you."

"Please tell him that I want to get a lawyer for him. Tell him that I *must* talk to him. I'll wait."

With an air of resignation the Sheriff walked through a door at the back of the room.

The prisoner was stretched out on his bunk, reading. He looked up from his book.

"Mrs. White wants to talk to you. D'you want to see her?"

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"No. No, I don't believe so," Burton Turner said.

"Didn't think you would. She said to tell you she wanted to hire a lawyer to defend you."

Burton Turner put his book on his lap and ran his hand over his dark curly hair. He looked amused. "Tell Mrs. White thank you, but I won't need her help," he said.

The Sheriff scratched his head. "If you ask me, she's batty—a real loony. Been running all over town telling everybody who'll listen that she shot her husband. Course she's been in an institution, they say." He looked coldly at the prisoner. "For my money they never should've let her out." He started to walk away.

"Hold on." Burton Turner hesitated. "I've changed my mind. I think I will talk to her."

Laura followed the Sheriff down a hall to a cell door which he unlocked; then the Sheriff stood aside to let her enter. She waited until she heard the door to the Sheriff's office close before she looked directly at the prisoner.

She knew that Burton Turner was far more composed than she. She knew that she looked white and drawn, and she kept twisting her hands while he stood quietly before her, politely inclining his head, to all appearances, unconcerned.

"I've done everything I can," she said. "I can't do any more by myself. I'd like to bring a first-class lawyer up from New York—someone who will know how to find experts to clear you."

"That's very kind of you, but you needn't trouble," he said.

"No one in this town will believe that it was I who shot Horace," she said. "No one listens when I tell them that Horace was always overprotective. Ever since our marriage he'd been shielding me, and he kept shielding me right up to the end. It's utterly unbelievable that my husband described a man out of thin air and that you should come along and resemble someone who never existed except in Horace's imagination. It was just chance—sheer chance."

"I don't believe much in chance, Mrs. White," he said. "Here, sit down." He indicated a chair and offered her a cigarette.

She shook her head. "They're going to charge you with murder."

"Let them," he said.

"Didn't you hear me? *Murder.*"

"I heard you perfectly well." He lit a cigarette for himself.

"Then let me arrange for your defense," she begged.

"No."

"You've got to let me," she said brokenly.

"Why?" he asked.

"Because . . ." She stopped and started again. "Because I *meant* to kill Horace." Her voice dropped to a whisper. "Something happened to me when I felt that gun in my hands. It was Horace or me. He'd made my life his, completely his—he had none

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of his own, except for his hunting once a year. I ended up in a sanitarium because Horace told me what to do and where to go and what to wear and how long to sleep and what to eat. Good God, don't you understand?—he was smothering me! He was going to keep smothering me till the day one of us died."

For the first time Burton Turner looked interested.

"I thought people would say it was an accident—I was sure they'd say that. Hunting accidents happen all the time, don't they?" Laura said.

He nodded.

"But it wasn't an accident. I'm a murderer. Don't you understand? —I'm a murderer!"

"Then that makes us even, Mrs. White," he said.

"But *I* shot him—not you."

He smiled. "Surely they've told you about the girl I was supposed to have killed?"

"Yes."

"So now I'll trade a crime I didn't commit for one I did."

"Oh . . ." It took her a few moments to understand. "But that doesn't help *me!* How can you expect me to go on living, knowing all the time that—" She grasped his arm. "Please. For my sake, let me do something."

He looked over his shoulder through the narrow window that faced the street, then back at her. "You're giving up too easily, Mrs. White," he said. He smiled again, only this time Laura knew she would see his smile over and over as long as she lived.

He removed her hand from his arm.

"Don't worry," he said softly. "Your turn will come."

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Cast your detective-story memories back a generation . . . to fabulous twin diamonds and a romantic legend—one diamond formerly the right eye of an Oriental temple god, the other the left eye; to a mysterious Chinese hunting the two sacred jewels; to warning letters and sinister threats—you know the familiar ingredients—or do you? "The whole affair was so bizarre, so unreal." But was it? . . . The amazing little Hercule Poirot and his amazing little gray cells—he will tell you "he sees nothing but facts"—n'est-ce pas?

POIROT PUTS A FINGER IN THE PIE

by AGATHA CHRISTIE

I WAS STANDING AT THE WINDOW OF Poirot's rooms looking out idly on the street below. "That's queer," I exclaimed suddenly under my breath.

"What is, *mon ami?*" asked Poirot placidly, from the depths of his comfortable chair.

"Deduce, Poirot, from the following facts. Here is a young lady, richly dressed—fashionable hat, magnificent furs. She is coming along slowly, looking up at the houses as she goes. Unknown to her, she is being shadowed by three men and a middle-aged woman. They have just been joined by an errand boy who points at the girl. What drama is being played? Is the girl a crook, and are the shadowers detectives preparing to arrest her? Or are *they* the scoundrels, plotting to attack an innocent victim? What does the great detective say?"

"The great detective, *mon ami,* chooses, as ever, the simplest course. He rises to see for himself." And my friend joined me at the window.

In a minute he gave vent to an amused chuckle.

"As usual, your facts are tinged with your incurable romanticism. That is Miss Mary Marvell, the film star. She is being followed by a bevy of admirers who have recognized her. And, *en passant,* my dear Hastings, she is quite aware of the fact."

I laughed. "So all is explained! But you get no marks for that, Poirot. It was a mere matter of recognition."

"En vérité! And how many times have you seen Mary Marvell on the screen, *mon cher?"*

I thought. "About a dozen times."

"And I— once! Yet *I* recognize her, and *you* do not."

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Originally titled, "The Adventure of the Western Star."

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"She looks so different," I replied feebly.

"*Sacré!*" cried Poirot. "Is it that you expect her to promenade herself in the streets of London in a cowboy hat, or with a bunch of curls, as an Irish colleen? Always with you it is the non-essentials!"

I shrugged, slightly annoyed.

"But console yourself, *mon ami,*" said Poirot. "All cannot be as Hercule Poirot!"

"You really have the best opinion of yourself of anyone I ever knew," I said, divided between amusement and annoyance.

"What will you? When one is unique, one knows it! And others share that opinion—even, if I mistake not, Miss Mary Marvell."

"What?"

"Without doubt. She is coming here."

"How do you know that?"

"Very simply. This street, it is not aristocratic, *mon ami*. In it there is no fashionable doctor, no fashionable dentist—still less is there a fashionable milliner. But there *is* a fashionable detective. *Oui,* my friend, it is true—I am become the mode, the *dernier cri!* One says to another, *'Comment?* You have lost your gold pencil-case? You must go to the little Belgian. He is too marvelous! And they arrive! In flocks, *mon ami!* With problems of the most foolish!" A bell rang below. "What did I tell you? That is Miss Marvell."

As usual, Poirot was right. After a short interval the American film star was ushered in, and we rose to our feet.

Mary Marvell was undoubtedly one of the most popular actresses on the screen. She had only lately arrived in England with her husband, Gregory B. Rolf, also a film actor. Their marriage had taken place about a year ago in the States and this was their first visit to England.

They had been given a great reception. Everyone was prepared to go mad over Mary Marvell, her wonderful clothes, her furs, her jewels—above all one jewel, the great diamond which had been nicknamed, to match its owner, the Western Star. Much, true and untrue, had been written about this famous gem which was reported to be insured for £50,000.

All these details passed rapidly through my mind as I joined Poirot in greeting our client. Miss Marvell was small and slender, very fair and girlish-looking, with the wide innocent blue eyes of a child.

Poirot drew forward a chair for her, and she commenced talking at once.

"You will probably think me very foolish, Monsieur Poirot, but Lord Cronshaw was telling me last night how wonderfully you cleared up the mystery of his nephew's death, and I felt that I just must have your advice. I suppose it's only a silly hoax —Gregory says so—but it's just worrying me to death."

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Poirot beamed encouragement. "Proceed, madame. You comprehend, I am still in the dark."

"It's these letters." Miss Marvell unclasped her handbag, and drew out three envelopes which she handed to Poirot.

The latter scrutinized them closely.

"Cheap paper—the name and address carefully printed. Let us see the inside." He drew out the enclosures.

I had joined him, and was leaning over his shoulder. The writing on the first letter consisted of a single sentence, carefully printed like the envelope. It read:

"The great diamond which is the left eye of the god must return whence it came."

The second letter was couched in precisely the same terms, but the third was more explicit:

"You have been warned. You have not obeyed. Now the diamond will be taken from you. At the full of the moon, the two diamonds which are the left and right eyes of the god shall return. So it is written."

"The first letter I treated as a joke," explained Miss Marvell. "When I got the second, I began to wonder. The third one came yesterday, and it seemed to me that, after all, the matter might be more serious than I had imagined."

"I see they did not come by post, these letters."

"No, they were left by hand—by a *Chinese*. That is what frightens me."

"Why?"

"Because it was from a Chinese in San Francisco that Gregory bought the jewel three years ago."

"I see, madame, that you believe the diamond referred to to be—"

"The Western Star," finished Miss Marvell. "That's so. At the same time, Gregory remembers that there was some story attached to the stone, but the Chinese wasn't handing out any information. Gregory says he seemed just scared to death, and in a mortal hurry to get rid of the thing. He only asked about a tenth of its value. It was Greg's wedding present to me."

Poirot nodded thoughtfully. "The story seems of an almost unbelievable romanticism. And yet—who knows? Please, Hastings, hand me my little almanac."

I complied.

"*Voyons!*" said Poirot, turning the leaves. "When is the date of the full moon? Ah, Friday next. That is in three days' time. *Eh bien*, madame, you seek my advice—I give it to you. This *belle histoire* may be a hoax—but it may not! Therefore I counsel you to place the diamond in my keeping until after Friday next."

A cloud passed over the actress's face.

"I'm afraid that's impossible."

"You have it with you—*hein?*" Poirot was watching her narrowly.

The girl hesitated a moment, then

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slipped her hand into the bosom of her gown, drawing out a long thin chain. She leaned forward, opening her hand. In the palm, a stone of fire, exquisitely set in platinum, winked at us solemnly.

Poirot drew in his breath.

"*Epatant!*" he murmured. "You permit, madame?" He took the jewel and examined it keenly, then handed it back with a little bow. "A magnificent stone—without a flaw. Ah, *cent tonnerres!* and you carry it about with you, *comme ça!*"

"No, no, I'm really very careful, Monsieur Poirot. As a rule, it's locked up in my jewel case and left in the hotel safe. We're staying at the Magnificent, you know. I just brought it along today for you to see."

"And you will leave it with me, *n'est-ce pas?* You will be advised by Papa Poirot?"

"Well, you see, it's this way, Monsieur Poirot. On Friday we're going down to Yardly Chase to spend a few days with Lord and Lady Yardly."

Her words awoke a vague echo of remembrance in my mind. Some gossip—what was it now? A few years ago, when Lord and Lady Yardly had paid a visit to the States, rumor had it that his lordship had rather gone the pace out there with the assistance of some lady friends. But surely there was something more, some gossip which coupled Lady Yardly's name with that of a movie star in California—and then it came to me in a flash. Of course—Gregory B. Rolf!

"I'll let you into a little secret, Monsieur Poirot," Miss Marvell was continuing. "We've got a deal on with Lord Yardly. There's some chance of our making a film in his ancestral castle."

"At Yardly Chase?" I cried, interested. "Why, it's one of the showplaces of England."

Miss Marvell nodded. "I guess it's the real old feudal stuff, all right. But he wants a pretty stiff price, and of course I don't know yet whether the deal will go through —"

"But—I demand pardon if I am dense, madame—is it not possible to visit Yardly Chase without taking the diamond with you?"

A shrewd look came into Miss Marvell's eyes which belied her childlike appearance.

"I want to wear it down there."

"Surely," I said suddenly. "There are some very famous jewels in the Yardly collection, a large diamond among them?"

"That's so," said Miss Marvell briefly.

I heard Poirot murmur, "Ah, *c'est comme ça!*" Then he said aloud, with his usual uncanny luck in hitting the bull's-eye—he dignifies it by the name of psychology: "Then you are without doubt already acquainted with Lady Yardly —or perhaps your husband is?"

"Gregory knew her when she was

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in America three years ago," said Miss Marvell. She hesitated a moment, then added abruptly, "Do you ever see *Society Gossip?*"

We both nodded.

"I asked because in this week's issue there is an article on famous jewels, and it's really very curious —" She broke off.

I rose, went to the table, and returned with a copy of the paper in question. She took it from me, found the article, and began to read aloud:

". . . Among other famous stones may be included the Star of the East, a diamond in the possession of the Yardly family. An ancestor of the present Lord Yardly brought it back with him from China, and a romantic story is said to attach to it. According to this, the stone was once the right eye of a temple god. Another diamond, exactly similar in form and size, was the left eye, and the story goes that this jewel, too, would in the course of time be stolen. 'One eye shall go West, the other East, till they shall meet once more, then in triumph return to the god.' It is a curious coincidence that there is at the present time a stone corresponding closely in description with this one, and known as the Western Star. It is the property of the celebrated film actress, Mary Marvell. A comparison of the two stones would be interesting."

"Epatant!" murmured Poirot. "Without doubt a romance of the first water." He turned to Mary Marvell. "And you are not afraid, madame? You have no superstitious terrors? You do not fear to introduce these two Siamese twins to each other lest a mysterious stranger should appear and, hey presto! whisk them both back to China?"

His tone was mocking, but I fancied that an undercurrent of seriousness lay beneath it.

"I don't believe that Lady Yardly's diamond is anything like as good a stone as mine," said Miss Marvell. "Anyway, I'm going to find out."

What more Poirot would have said I do not know, for at that moment the door flew open and a splendid-looking man strode into the room. From his crisply curling black head to the tips of his shoes he was a hero fit for romance.

"I said I'd call for you, Mary," said Gregory Rolf, "and here I am. Well, what does Monsieur Poirot say to our little problem? Just one big hoax, same as I do?"

Poirot smiled up at the big actor. They made a ridiculous contrast.

"Hoax or no hoax, Mr. Rolf," Poirot said dryly, "I have advised your wife not to take the jewel with her to Yardly Chase on Friday."

"I'm with you there, sir. I've already said so to Mary. But she's a woman through and through, and I guess she can't bear to think of another woman outshining her in the jewel department."

"What nonsense, Gregory!" said

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Mary Marvell sharply. But she flushed.

Poirot shrugged. "Madame, I have advised. I can do no more. *C'est fini.*"

He bowed them both to the door.

"Ah, *la la,*" he observed, returning. "*Histoire de femmes!* The good husband, he hit the nail on the button—*tout de même,* he was not tactful!"

I told him of my remembrances, and he nodded vigorously.

"So I thought. All the same, there is something curious underneath all this. With your permission, *mon ami,* I will take the air. Await my return, I beg of you. I shall not be long."

I was half asleep in my chair when the landlady tapped on the door, and put her head in.

"It's another lady to see Mr. Poirot, sir. I've told her he was out, but she says as how she'll wait, seeing as she's come up from the country."

"Oh, show her in, Mrs. Murchison. Perhaps I can do something for her."

In another moment the lady had been ushered in. My heart gave a leap as I recognized her—Lady Yardly's portrait had figured too often in the Society papers.

"Do sit down, Lady Yardly," I said, drawing forward a chair. "My friend Poirot is out, but he'll be back shortly."

She thanked me and sat down. A very different type, this, from Mary Marvell. Tall, dark, with flashing eyes, and a pale proud face—yet something wistful in the curves of the mouth.

I felt a desire to rise to the occasion. Why not? In Poirot's presence I have frequently felt that I do not appear at my best. And yet there is no doubt that I, too, possess the deductive sense in a marked degree. I leaned forward on a sudden impulse.

"Lady Yardly," I said, "I know why you have come here. You have received threatening letters about the diamond."

There was no doubt my bolt shot home. She stared at me open-mouthed, all color vanished from her cheeks.

"You know?" she gasped. "How?"

"By a perfectly logical process. If Miss Marvell has had warning letters—"

"Miss Marvell? She has been here?"

"She has just left. As I was saying, if she, as owner of one of the twin diamonds, has received a series of warnings, you, as the owner of the other stone, must necessarily have received them too. You see how simple it is? I am right, then?"

For a moment she hesitated, as though in doubt whether to trust me or not; then she bowed her head in assent.

"Were yours, too, left by hand—by a Chinese?"

"No, they came by post. But, tell

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me, has Miss Marvell undergone the same experience, then?"

I recounted to her the events of the morning. She listened attentively.

"It all fits in. My letters are duplicates to hers. It is true that they came by post, but there was a curious perfume about them—something that suggested the East to me. What does it all mean?"

"That is what we must find out," I said. "You have the letters with you? We might learn something from the postmarks."

"Unfortunately I destroyed them. You understand, at the time I regarded it as just a foolish joke. Can it be true that some Chinese gang is trying to recover the diamonds? It seems too incredible!"

We went over the facts again, but could get no further toward the solution of the mystery. At last Lady Yardly rose.

"I really don't think I need wait for Monsieur Poirot. You can tell him all this, can't you? Thank you so much, Mr.—"

She hesitated, her hand outstretched.

"Captain Hastings."

"Of course! How stupid of me. You're a friend of the Cavendishes, aren't you? It was Margaret Cavendish who sent me to Monsieur Poirot."

When my friend returned, I enjoyed telling him what had occurred during his absence. He cross-questioned me rather sharply over the details of our conversation and I could read between the lines that he was not pleased to have been away. I also fancied that the dear old fellow was just a bit jealous. It had become rather a pose with him to belittle my abilities, and I think he was chagrined at finding no loophole for criticism.

"Bien!" he said at length, with a curious look on his face. "The plot develops. Pass me, I pray you, that 'Peerage' on the top shelf there." He turned the leaves. "Ah, here we are! 'Yardly . . . 10th viscount, served South African War' . . . 'married Hon. Maude Stopperton, fourth daughter of 3rd Baron Cotteril' . . . 'has two daughters . . . Clubs . . . residences.' . . . *Voilà,* that does not tell us much. But tomorrow morning we see this *milord."*

"What?"

"Yes. I telegraphed him."

"I thought you had washed your hands of the case?"

"I am not acting for Miss Marvell since she refuses to be guided by my advice. What I do now is for my own satisfaction—the satisfaction of Hercule Poirot! Decidedly, I must have a finger in this pie."

"And you calmly wire Lord Yardly to dash up to town just to suit your convenience. He won't be pleased."

"Au contraire, if I preserve for him his family diamond, he ought to be very grateful."

"Then you really think there is a

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chance of its being stolen?" I asked eagerly.

"Almost a certainty," replied Poirot. "Everything points that way."

"But how—"

Poirot stopped my questions with an airy gesture.

"Not now, I pray you. Let us not confuse the mind. And observe that 'Peerage'—how you have replaced him! The tallest books should go on the top shelf, the next tallest in the row beneath, and so on. Thus we have order, *method,* which, as I have often told you, Hastings—"

"Exactly," I said hastily, and put the offending volume in its proper place.

Lord Yardly turned out to be a cheery, loud-voiced sportsman with a rather red face, but with a good-humored bonhomie about him that was distinctly attractive and made up for any lack of mentality.

"Extraordinary business this, Monsieur Poirot. Can't make head or tail of it. Seems my wife's been getting odd letters, and that this Miss Marvell's had 'em too. What does it all mean?"

Poirot handed him the copy of *Society Gossip.*

"First, *milord,* I would ask if these facts are substantially correct?"

The peer took it. His face darkened with anger as he read.

"Damned nonsense!" he spluttered. "There's never been any romantic story attaching to the diamond. It came from India originally, I believe. I never heard of all this Chinese god stuff."

"Still, the stone *is* known as the Star of the East."

"Well, what if it is?" he asked.

Poirot smiled, but made no direct reply.

"What I would ask you to do, *milord,* is to place yourself in my hands. If you do so unreservedly, I have great hopes of averting the catastrophe."

"Then you think there's actually something in this wild tale?"

"Will you do as I ask you?"

"Of course I will, but—"

"*Bien!* Then permit that I ask you a few questions. This affair of Yardly Chase, is it, as you say, all fixed up between you and Mr. Rolf?"

"Oh, he told you about it, did he? No, there's nothing settled." He hesitated, the brick-red color of his face deepening. "Might as well get the thing straight. I've made rather an ass of myself in many ways, Monsieur Poirot—and I'm head over ears in debt—but I want to pull up. I'm fond of the kids, and I want to be able to live on at the old place. Gregory Rolf is offering me big money—enough to set me on my feet again. I don't want to do it—I hate the thought of all that crowd play-acting round the Chase—but I may have to, unless—" He broke off.

Poirot eyed him keenly. "You have, then, another string to your

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bow? Permit that I make a guess? It is to sell the Star of the East?"

Lord Yardly nodded. "That's it. It's been in the family for some generations, but it's not entailed. Still, it's not the easiest thing in the world to find a purchaser. Hoffberg, the Hatton Garden man, is on the lookout for a customer, but he'll have to find one soon, or it's a washout."

"One more question, *permettez*—Lady Yardly, which plan does she approve?"

"Oh, she's bitterly opposed to my selling the jewel. You know how women are. She's all for this film stunt."

"I comprehend," said Poirot. He then rose briskly to his feet. "You return to Yardly Chase at once? *Bien!* Say no word to anyone—to *anyone,* mind—but expect us there this evening. We will arrive shortly after five."

"All right, but I still don't see—"

"Ca n'a pas d'importance," said Poirot kindly. "You wish that I preserve for you your diamond?"

"Yes, but—"

A sadly bewildered nobleman left the room.

It was half-past five when we arrived at Yardly Chase, and followed the dignified butler to the old paneled hall with its fire of blazing logs. A pretty picture met our eyes: Lady Yardly sitting with her two daughters, and Lord Yardly smiling down on them.

"Monsieur Poirot and Captain Hastings," announced the butler.

Lady Yardly looked up with a start, and her husband came forward uncertainly, his eyes seeking instructions from Poirot. The little man was equal to the occasion.

"All my excuses! It is that I investigate still this affair of Miss Marvell's. She comes to you on Friday, does she not? I make a little tour first to make sure that all is secure. Also I wanted to ask of Lady Yardly if she recollected at all the postmarks on the letters she received?"

Lady Yardly shook her head. "I'm afraid I don't. It is stupid of me. But, you see, I never dreamed of taking them seriously."

"You'll stay the night?" said Lord Yardly.

"Oh, *milord,* I fear to incommode you. We have left our bags at the inn."

"That's all right." Lord Yardly had his cue. "We'll send down for them. No, no—no trouble, I assure you."

Poirot permitted himself to be persuaded and began to make friends with the children. In a short time they were romping together and had even dragged me into the game.

"Vous êtes bonne mère," said Poirot, with a gallant little bow, as the children were reluctantly taken away by a stern nurse.

Lady Yardly smoothed her ruffled hair.

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"I adore them," she said with a little catch in her voice.

"And they you—with reason!" Poirot bowed again.

A gong sounded and we rose to go up to our rooms. At that moment the butler entered with a telegram on a salver which he handed to Lord Yardly. The latter tore it open with a brief word of apology. As he read it he stiffened visibly, then handed the telegram to his wife. He glanced at my friend.

"Just a minute, Monsieur Poirot. I feel you ought to know about this. It's from Hoffberg. He thinks he's found a customer for the diamond —an American, sailing for the States tomorrow. They're sending down a chap tonight to see the stone. By Jove, if this goes through —" Words failed him.

"I wish you wouldn't sell it, George," Lady Yardly said quietly. "It's been in the family so long." She waited, as though for a reply, but none came. She shrugged. "I must go and dress. I suppose I had better 'display the goods.'"

She turned to Poirot with a slight grimace. "It's one of the most hideous necklaces that was ever designed! George has always promised to have the stones reset for me, but it's never been done." She left the room.

Half an hour later we three were assembled in the great drawing-room awaiting the lady of the house. It was already a few minutes past the dinner hour.

Suddenly there was a low rustle, and Lady Yardly appeared in the doorway, a radiant figure in a long white shimmering dress. Round her neck was a rivulet of fire. She stood there with one hand touching the necklace.

"Behold the sacrifice," she said gaily. "Wait while I turn the big light on and you shall feast your eyes on the ugliest necklace in England."

The light switches were just outside the door. As she stretched out her hand to them, an incredible thing happened. Suddenly, without any warning, every light went out, the door banged shut, and from the other side of it came a scream.

"My God!" cried Lord Yardly. "That was Maude's voice! What has happened?"

We rushed blindly for the door, cannoning into each other in the darkness. And then what a sight met our eyes! Lady Yardly lay senseless on the marble floor, and there was a crimson mark on her white throat where the necklace had been wrenched from her neck.

As we bent over her, uncertain whether she were dead or alive, her eyelids opened.

"The Chinese," she whispered painfully. "The Chinese—out the side door."

Lord Yardly sprang up with an oath. I accompanied him, my heart beating wildly. The oriental again!

The side door was a small one in the angle of the wall, not more

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than half a dozen yards away. As we reached it I gave a cry. There, just short of the threshold, lay the glittering necklace, evidently dropped by the thief in the panic of his flight.

I swooped joyously down on it. Then I uttered another cry which Lord Yardly echoed. For in the middle of the necklace was a great gap. The Star of the East was missing!

"That settles it," I breathed. "These were no ordinary thieves. This one stone was all they wanted."

"But how did the fellow get in?"

"Through this door."

"But it's always locked."

I shook my head. "It's not locked now. See," and I pulled it open as I spoke.

As I did so, something fluttered to the ground. I picked it up. It was a piece of silk, and the embroidery was unmistakable. It had been torn from a Chinese robe.

"In his haste it caught in the door," I explained. "Come, hurry. He cannot have gone far."

But we hunted and searched in vain. In the darkness of the night the thief had found it easy to make his getaway. We returned reluctantly, and Lord Yardly sent one of the footmen to fetch the police.

Lady Yardly, aptly ministered to by Poirot, who is as good as a woman in these matters, was sufficiently recovered to tell her story.

"I was just going to turn on the big light," she said, "when a man sprang at me from behind. He tore the necklace from my neck with such force that I fell headlong to the floor. As I fell I saw him disappearing through the side door. Then I realized by the pigtail and the embroidered robe that he was Chinese." She stopped with a shudder.

The butler reappeared. He spoke in a low voice to Lord Yardly.

"A gentleman from Mr. Hoffberg's, m'lord. He says you expect him."

"Good heavens!" cried the distracted nobleman. "I must see him, I suppose. No, not here, Millings—in the library."

I drew Poirot aside. "Look here, my dear fellow, hadn't we better get back to London?"

"You think so, Hastings? Why?"

"Well"—I coughed delicately—"things haven't gone very well, have they? I mean, you tell Lord Yardly to place himself in your hands and all will be well—and then the diamond vanishes from under your very nose!"

"True," said Poirot, rather crestfallen. "It was not one of my most striking triumphs."

This way of describing events almost caused me to smile, but I stuck to my guns.

"So, having—pardon the expression—rather made a mess of things, don't you think it would be more graceful to leave immediately?"

"And the dinner, the without

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doubt excellent dinner, that the *chef* of Lord Yardly has prepared?"

"Oh, what's dinner!" I said impatiently.

Poirot held up his hands in horror.

"*Mon Dieu!* It is that in this country you treat the affairs gastronomic with a criminal indifference."

"There's another reason why we should get back to London as soon as possible," I continued.

"What is that, my friend?"

"The other diamond," I said, lowering my voice. "Miss Marvell's."

"*Eh bien,* what of it?"

"Don't you see?" His unusual obtuseness annoyed me. "They've got one, now they'll go for the other."

"*Tiens!*" cried Poirot, stepping back a pace and regarding me with admiration. "But your brain marches, my friend! Figure to yourself that for the moment I had not thought of that! But there is plenty of time. The full of the moon, it is not until Friday."

I shook my head dubiously. The full-of-the-moon theory left me entirely cold. I had my way with Poirot, however, and we departed at once, leaving behind a note of explanation and apology for Lord Yardly.

My idea was to go at once to the Hotel Magnificent and relate to Miss Marvell what had occurred; but Poirot vetoed the plan, and insisted that the morning would be time enough. I agreed grudgingly.

In the morning Poirot seemed strangely disinclined to go out. I began to suspect that, having made a mistake to start with, he was singularly loath to proceed with the case. In answer to my persuasions, he pointed out, with admirable common sense, that as the details of the affair at Yardly Chase were already in the morning papers, the Rolfs would know quite as much as we could tell them. I gave in unwillingly.

Events proved my forebodings to be fully justified. About two o'clock the telephone rang. Poirot answered it. He listened for some moments, then with a brief *"Bien, j'y serai"* he rang off, and turned to me.

"What do you think, *mon ami?*" He looked half ashamed, half excited. "The diamond of Miss Marvell, it has been stolen."

"What?" I cried. "And what about the 'full of the moon' now?" Poirot hung his head. "When did this happen?"

"This morning, I understand."

I shook my head sadly. "If only you had listened to me. You see I was right."

"It appears so, *mon ami,*" said Poirot cautiously. "Appearances are deceptive, they say, but it certainly appears so."

As we hurried in a taxi to the Hotel Magnificent, I puzzled out the true inwardness of the scheme.

"That 'full of the moon' idea was clever. The whole point of it was to get us to concentrate on the Friday,

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and so be off our guard beforehand. It is a pity you did not realize that."

"*Ma foi!*" said Poirot airily, his nonchalance quite restored after its brief eclipse. "One cannot think of everything!"

I felt sorry for him. He did so hate failure of any kind.

At the Magnificent we were ushered at once into the manager's office. Gregory Rolf was there with two men from Scotland Yard. A pale-faced clerk sat opposite them.

Rolf nodded to us as we entered.

"We're getting to the bottom of it," he said. "But it's almost unbelievable. How the guy had the nerve I can't think."

A few minutes sufficed to give us the facts. Mr. Rolf had gone out of the hotel at 11:15. At 11:30 a gentleman, so like him in appearance as to pass muster, entered the hotel and demanded the jewel case from the safe. He duly signed the receipt, remarking carelessly as he did so, "Looks a bit different from my usual signature, but I hurt my hand getting out of the taxi." The clerk merely smiled and remarked that he saw very little difference. Rolf laughed and said, "Well, don't run me in as a crook this time. I've been getting threatening letters from some Chinese, and the worst of it is I looked rather like a Chinese myself—something about my eyes."

"I looked at him," said the clerk who was telling us this, "and I saw at once what he meant. The eyes slanted up at the corners like an Oriental's. I'd never noticed it before."

"Darn it all, man," roared Gregory Rolf, leaning forward, "Do you notice it now?"

The man looked at him and started.

"No, sir," he said. "I can't say that I do." And indeed there was nothing even remotely Oriental about his frank brown eyes.

The Scotland Yard man grunted. "Bold customer. Thought the eyes might be noticed, he took the bull by the horns to disarm suspicion. He must have watched you leave the hotel, sir, and nipped in as soon as you were away."

"What about the jewel case?" I asked.

"It was found in a corridor of the hotel. Only one thing had been taken—the Western Star."

We stared at each other—the whole affair was so bizarre, so unreal.

Poirot hopped briskly to his feet. "I have not been of much use, I fear," he said regretfully. "Is it permitted to see Madame?"

"I guess she's prostrated with the shock," explained Rolf.

"Then perhaps I might have a few words alone with you, monsieur?"

"Certainly."

In about five minutes Poirot reappeared.

"Now, my friend," he said gaily. "To a post office. I have to send a telegram."

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"To whom?"

"Lord Yardly. Come, come, *mon ami*. I know all that you feel about this miserable business. I have not distinguished myself! You, in my place, might have distinguished yourself! *Bien!* All is admitted. Let us forget it and have lunch."

It was about four o'clock when we entered Poirot's rooms. A figure rose from a chair by the window. It was Lord Yardly. He looked haggard.

"I got your wire and came up at once. Look here, I've been round to Hoffberg, and they know nothing about that man of theirs last night, or the wire either. Do you think that—"

Poirot held up his hand. "My excuses! I sent that wire, and hired the gentleman in question."

"You? But why?"

"My little idea was to bring things to a head," explained Poirot.

"Bring things to a head! Oh, my God!" cried Lord Yardly.

"And the ruse succeeded," said Poirot cheerfully. "Therefore, *milord*, I have much pleasure in returning you—this!" With a dramatic gesture he produced a glittering object.

"The Star of the East," gasped Lord Yardly. "But I don't understand—"

"No?" said Poirot. "It makes no matter. Believe me, it was necessary for the diamond to be stolen. I promised you that it should be preserved to you, and I have kept my word. You must permit me to keep my little secret. Convey, I beg of you, the assurance of my deepest respect to Lady Yardly, and tell her how pleased I am to be able to restore her jewel to her. Good day, *milord*."

And smiling, the amazing little man conducted the bewildered nobleman to the door. He returned gently rubbing his hands.

"Poirot," I said. "Am I quite demented?"

"No, *mon ami*, but you are, as always, in a mental fog."

"How did you get the diamond?"

"From Mr. Rolf."

"Rolf?"

"Mais oui! The warning letters, the Chinese, the article in *Society Gossip*— all sprang from the ingenious brain of Mr. Rolf! The two diamonds, supposed to be so miraculously alike—bah! they did not exist. There was only one diamond, my friend! Originally in the Yardly collection, for three years it has been in the possession of Mr. Rolf. He stole it this morning with the assistance of a touch of grease paint at the corner of each eye! Ah, I must see him on the film, he is indeed an artist, *celui-là!*"

"But why did he steal his own diamond?" I asked, puzzled.

"For many reasons. To begin with, Lady Yardly was getting restive."

"Lady Yardly."

"You comprehend she was left much alone in California. Her hus-

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band was amusing himself elsewhere. Mr. Rolf was handsome, he had an air about him of romance. But *au fond,* he is very businesslike, *ce monseiur!* He made love to Lady Yardly, and then he blackmailed her. I taxed the lady with the truth the other night, and she admitted it. She swore that she had only been indiscreet. I believe her.

"But, undoubtedly, Rolf had letters of hers that could be twisted to bear a different interpretation. Terrified by the threat of a divorce, and the prospect of being separated from her children, she agreed to all he wished. She had no money of her own, and she was forced to permit him to substitute a paste replica for the real stone.

All goes well. Lord Yardly prepares to settle down. And then comes the menace of the possible sale of the diamond. The substitution will be discovered. Without doubt she writes off frantically to Gregory Rolf who has just arrived in England. He soothes her by promising to arrange all—and prepares for a double robbery. In this way he will quiet the lady, who might conceivably tell all to her husband, an affair which would not suit our blackmailer at all, and he will have £50,000 insurance money —aha, you had forgotten that!—and he will still have the diamond!

"At this point I put my finger in the pie. The arrival of a diamond expert is announced. Lady Yardly, as I felt sure she would, immediately arranges a robbery—and does it very well too! But Hercule Poirot, he sees nothing but facts. What happens in actuality? The lady switches *off* the light, bangs shut the door, throws the necklace down the passage, and screams. She has already wrenched out the paste diamond with pliers upstairs—"

"But we saw the necklace round her neck!" I objected.

"I demand pardon, my friend. Her hand concealed the part of it where the diamond would have shown. To place a piece of silk in the door *beforehand* is child's-play! Of course, as soon as Rolf read of the robbery, he arranged his own little comedy."

"What did you say to him?" I asked.

"I said to him that Lady Yardly had told her husband all, that I was empowered to recover the jewel, and that if it were not immediately handed over proceedings would be taken. Also a few more little — what you call them?—little white lies which occurred to me. He was as wax in my hands!"

I pondered the matter.

"It seems a little unfair to Mary Marvell. She has lost her diamond through no fault of her own."

"Bah!" said Poirot. "She has a magnificent advertisement. That is all she cares for, that one! Now the other, she is different. *Bonne mère, très femme!*"

"I suppose it was Rolf who sent her the duplicate letters."

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"Pas du tout," said Poirot briskly. "She came by the advice of Margaret Cavendish to seek my aid in her dilemma. Then she heard that Mary Marvell, whom she knew to be her enemy, had been here, and she changed her mind, jumping at a pretext that *you,* my friend, offered her. A very few questions sufficed to show me that *you* told her of the letters, not she you! She jumped at the chance your words offered."

"I don't believe it," I cried, stung.

"Mon ami, it is a pity that you study not the psychology. She told you that the letters were destroyed? Oh, la la, *never* does a woman destroy a letter if she can avoid it! Not even if it would be more prudent to do so!"

"It's all very well," I said, my anger rising, "but you've made a perfect fool of me—from beginning to end!"

"But you were so enjoying yourself, my friend. I had not the heart to shatter your illusions."

"This time you've gone too far!"

"Mon Dieu, but how you enrage yourself for nothing, *mon ami!"*

"I'm fed up!" I went out, banging the door. Poirot had made an absolute laughing-stock of me. I decided he needed a sharp lesson. I would let some time elapse before I forgave him. Why, he had *encouraged* me to make a fool of myself!"

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR:	**PAUL W. FAIRMAN**
TITLE:	***Every Inch a Gentleman***
TYPE:	Crime Story
LOCALES:	New York and Miami
TIME:	New Year's Eve
COMMENTS:	*Garson Ward lived with two women—his wife and his mistress. It seemed a most satisfactory arrangement. Then his mistress suggested an even better one . . .*

"WHO IS THE—THE MAN, DARling?" Marcia enunciated the word *man* delicately, then sipped at her martini as Garson answered, "He is a professional—entirely capable. I think that is all you need to know about him."

Marcia set her glass down and nodded; anyone noticing them, catching her smile, would have concluded that the sleek golden blonde and the handsome middle-aged man were possibly discussing a mutual friend—certainly not murder.

"It—it seems such a terrible thing to do," Marcia said, her smile appropriately fading.

Garson Ward looked at his beautiful mistress thoughtfully. "Arranging for this murder, my dear?"

Now she frowned. "Garson, please!"

He did not smile, but his eyes were not unkind as he said, "My dear, as you are already aware, I am not a moral man. But I do hate hypocrisy, so let's be adult enough to face this thing squarely and call a spade by its real name. Coyness and the air of genteel distaste were all right while you were persuading me to commit this crime, but that sort of thing hardly becomes **us** now."

"Why, Garson, I—"

"Also, Marcy, just between ourselves, let's divide the blame between us in the correct proportions."

Her arresting blue eyes hardened

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just a trifle. "If you are planning to blame it all on me—"

"I said divide it correctly. I'm sure you will admit that the thought was originally born in that beautiful head of yours."

"Garson, are trying to back out?"

"You know me better than that. I merely want a complete understanding on this business. Have you any objections?"

"I guess not, really. As you said, we are adult—not children."

"Do you recall the night we discussed the possibility of a man living with two women and still being fair to both?"

They were sitting at a corner table in a swank Park Avenue restaurant with attentive waiters running about and an orchestra playing softly behind some palm trees. In that setting the question seemed worldly, sophisticated, and intriguing.

"I remember. But why bring that up now?"

"Merely to place the exact time, my dear. That was the night you suggested murder as the only solution to a problem I didn't really know existed."

Marcia was frowning now, but not with any hostility. She was frankly puzzled. "I think you *are* trying to put all the moral weight on my shoulders."

"Not at all. I merely said the idea originated with you. Up to that night I had what I thought was a most satisfactory existence—a wife whom I looked on as broad-minded and tolerant, and a mistress whom I adored."

"And you're saying that *I* persuaded you—"

"*Persuaded* is not the word, my dear. *Convinced*, perhaps, although I like *revealed* much better. Your revelations began that night."

A little hostility crept into her frown now, even though she was being consciously careful. She *so* wanted things to go smoothly—the objective, the goal, was so close. Something between two and three millions, she estimated.

Actually—even though murder was admittedly a drastic solution to the problem—Marcia had had a hard time of it. The sophisticated Park Avenue plateau had steep walls and extremely narrow approaches. A girl had to be practical in her assessment of ways and means. The path was difficult but the rewards were great, and when a plum like Garson Ward fell into her lap, Marcia saw to it that he didn't bounce out.

At first she had been flattered by his attentions. Marcia and Garson had met at a cocktail party at the Pierre and when he suggested dinner the next evening she had accepted; then she made inquiries and learned who Garson Ward was. Middle-aged, obviously—Marcia put him at forty-five. Later, she discovered that she'd missed by two years; but on Garson Ward the late forties looked good.

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He turned out to be a rather fabulous character and she had a little trouble separating fact from rumor. A member of the international set with ample leisure that his wife's money made possible, Garson Ward was quite a catch. But a wife? In the beginning this dismayed Marcia a little; still, a girl dependent on cocktail parties and week-end invitations for her foothold in Park Avenue society couldn't be too particular. She would have preferred an eligible single man—but she would take anything she could get.

Garson's last affair had terminated with the death of the girl in a Cannes motor accident—Marcia had learned this from other sources. Then, after they became better acquainted, Garson told her about his wife Grace. Broad-minded. Understanding. An ideal marriage within the framework of which they pretty much led their own lives. But Marcia hadn't believed a word of it. She'd heard it before—while trying to acquire other bankrolls.

No, she hadn't believed a word of it—but that really made no difference. Only the stark legal fact that a man is not allowed two wives simultaneously loomed importantly to her. But even with this in mind, Marcia hadn't thought of murder—at least not in the beginning. Later, safely esconced as Garson's mistress—

But Garson was going into that very aspect of it now.

". . . started that night when you suggested I'd perhaps been sold a bill of goods. You'll remember that I rather indignantly denied this and you did not press the point. But then, very skillfully—and patiently—you began to open my eyes to the truth."

Marcia emptied her cocktail glass with a quick, graceful gesture. "Must we go into all that, Garson?"

"Better now than later, my dear. I'll admit that with love involved, analysis may seem cold and crude."

Marcia looked up appealingly. "You do love me, don't you, Garson?"

"Can you doubt it?"

Of course she couldn't. Usually he was tender, considerate, and so charming it was simply maddening not to be married to him—and to all that money. But murder was a big step, so surely he was entitled to this strange mood, this rather obscure form of nervousness.

"Then our love does make it all worthwhile," she said softly.

"That and other things, my dear. Other things like money and position. In a sense, that makes it somewhat of a business deal and business deals are always carefully discussed and considered."

Her frown was a question. "Garson, you told me your plans had been made, that there was nothing more to arrange. Now you sound as though—"

"The plan has been arranged—but first let me finish with this

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matter of responsibility. As I was saying, you opened my eyes to certain facts. That my wife was greedy, suspicious, quite two-faced, and a definite threat to a way of life I've grown too fond of to turn away from."

In reviewing her attack, Marcia, at times, had been a little nervous and uncertain. Had she pushed him too hard at this point or at that? Had she been too grimly insistent at another? Once she'd actually been frightened—when she found herself hinting at a possible scandal if things did not go her way—but she'd burst into tears instantly and had been able to convey the impression that her love had made her momentarily desperate. He'd taken her tenderly in his arms, responding beautifully, and she'd resolved to go a little more slowly.

The next day Garson had alluded vaguely to murder as the solution. After being properly horrified, Marcia allowed the idea to jell slowly; and now, as she looked at her handsome husband-to-be across the candlelit table, she recalled the really nervous moments—the ones that vanished when she found that Garson was every inch a gentleman, that he planned to involve her in no way whatever. In fact, he would not reveal a single detail of his plan to her.

Now he was saying, "I have a little bad news, my dear. We will not spend New Year's Eve together."

Marcia's eyes narrowed. "Garson, we'd planned to—"

"I know, my dear. It will be a disappointment for both of us. But is it too great a price to pay for knowing that all our problems will be solved by the first day of the new year?"

"Then you've arranged the time and the place!"

"Yes."

"Garson, will I—will we be—oh, you know what I mean. Murder is—well, so dangerous."

He laughed softly, amused at her concern. He reached quickly across the table and touched her smooth cheek with open affection.

"Murder, my sweet," Garson said even more softly, "is not nearly as dangerous as most people think. In fact, it is a lucrative profession for a certain type of person. So you proceed exactly as you would with an impacted tooth or an inflamed appendix. You go to a specialist."

"You mean there is no chance of our becoming involved later?"

"Absolutely none. Only fools and amateurs who try to do the job themselves get into trouble."

"Like trying to remove your own appendix," Marcia said brightly.

"Precisely," Garson said.

"Then I suppose you want me to stay in my apartment on New Year's Eve? Or perhaps go where there are witnesses to my presence?"

"Witnesses—yes. But I want you much farther away. I want you to go to Florida."

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"Of course. Hundreds of miles away."

He looked at her beauty with quick tenderness and spoke in the voice she'd grown to know so well. "I'll miss you, my dear, I'll miss you terribly. But after it's over—"

"And I'll miss you, darling."

"We can still be together in spirit. That's why I want you to do exactly as I tell you."

"I will, darling."

She saw Garson's eyes brimming with love as he gazed deeply into hers. Then he said, "I want you to make a reservation at that small beach restaurant near Miami where we went during our last trip. Insist on a small table facing north."

"Why north?"

"So that you will be facing me, my dear. Then, at midnight, raise your glass and drink a toast to us—to you and to me—" He dropped his eyes and for a moment seemed quite shy, and now it was her turn to reach across and brush his cheek.

"You're so sweet when you're sentimental."

He fingered his glass as though in rehearsal for the proposed moment. "At precisely midnight, my dear. And my glass will be raised also."

"Sweetheart. Please take me out of here. I think I'm going to cry."

Three weeks later, New Year's Eve arrived promptly on schedule. Through custom, Garson Ward and his wife stayed home. They'd fallen into the habit of using that last night of the old year to sum up, to measure and evaluate their life together. Usually, it was quite a pleasant night.

Grace Ward was a tall, handsome woman with an air of quiet competence about her. She wore a gold taffeta dressing gown and as midnight approached they sat side by side in front of a crackling log fire at their country place. It was ideal New Year's weather: the snow was falling outside the big picture window and was so beautiful that Garson suggested they leave the drapes undrawn.

He poured two martinis and then reached over and gently placed his hand on Grace's. He sighed. "We've had quite a good life together, haven't we, my dear?"

Grace looked at him and smiled with both affection and amusement. "I suppose you might call it that. Of course, I could have broken it up several times because of your outrageous escapades."

Garson did not allow his expression to reveal how tragic such a breakup would have been from his point of view. He shuddered inwardly at the thought of being cut off at the purse strings; but he managed to smile.

"They were all quite innocent," he said. "Merely ways of stilling a certain inward restlessness that you know I'm cursed with. I was always certain you'd understand."

"Oh, quite. We survived, Garson, because you have always been so

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adroit. You seemed to know the one unforgivable sin—the one that you must never commit. You knew it and avoided it."

"Causing a scandal?"

Grace nodded.

"I sensed that from the beginning. Whenever there was the least chance of notoriety, I turned tail and ran like a yellow dog."

Grace turned her head and looked out the window. "The snow is beautiful."

"Our life together has been beautiful."

But Garson Ward's observation was merely a grouping of words, an automatic response. His mind was far away—in Florida, to be exact. The moment of midnight was near, and just before the clock began to boom twelve in the hall, Garson Ward raised his glass.

But he was not drinking to Marcia.

He was drinking to a certain specialist—a nameless shadow of a man so painstakingly careful in his work that he would not even get close enough to his victim to identify her—until the very moment of execution. And yet, in the end, how simple and how foolproof it had been.

The specialist had only to stand in the Miami darkness and pump a single, silenced bullet through a window into a girl who sat alone and raised her glass exactly at midnight to toast a murder . . .

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"I am not, you understand, trying to explain the strange event I'll swear took place that afternoon. And it was not a question of pink elephants at all . . ."

It is nearly 15 years—unbelievable!—since we published Mildred Arthur's "first story." In that long, long time—silence. Has Mildred Arthur published elsewhere? If she did, it was our misfortune not to come upon her work. If she didn't, why the long, long silence? For surely Mildred Arthur should be writing and writing and writing . . .

WEDNESDAY'S CHILD

by MILDRED ARTHUR

THE SECOND TIME I SAW LAURA Halloran I had a half-filled or half-empty (whichever way you choose to look at it) cocktail glass in one hand and an anchovy hors d'oeuvre in the other, and in all honesty I must tell you that it was not my first cocktail that day. I am not, you understand, trying to explain the strange event I'll swear took place that afternoon. And it was not a question of pink elephants at all.

I am what you might call a "drinking man"—that is, I'm accustomed to taking two or three or even four cocktails at a clip with no outward signs or untoward results. I hold my liquor well. My liver is in fine shape. When I drink I have no hallucinations, no visions. My speech does not thicken, and I do not stagger. I have never drunk enough to have experienced any of these, and I only mention them now so that I will not be accused of the obvious after I've told the story of that Sunday afternoon, March 17th, Saint Patrick's Day, and the cocktail party at the home of my good friend, James Halloran, and his wife, Rose.

I've known James Brian Fitzpatrick Halloran for well over ten years. He and I used to work together as director and writer for a government agency turning out public service films before the UN claimed me, and Rose and Madison Avenue claimed him. In those days he was known as Jim—and that should tell you a good deal about Rose Halloran.

I don't know much of her background except that she came from a small town in Pennsylvania, that her parents left her more than comfortably fixed, that she was an ambitious girl who, after Bryn Mawr had "finished" her, had come to New York determined to find her place in the world. I don't even know how she and James met, and

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somehow I never got around to inquiring. But my story is not about Rose, though she naturally relates to it. My story is about her daughter, Laura.

I first saw the child when she was six weeks old, propped up on an immense scarlet pillow in a corner of a white brocaded sofa in the Hallorans' plush 92nd Street apartment. I'm a bachelor myself—47 on my last birthday—so I don't anticipate any change in my status; but I've always felt an affinity for children, and if I may boast a bit, children have always seemed to take to me.

I can't say little Laura, at six weeks, beckoned me with open arms, but her immense dark eyes did follow me wherever I moved, and I felt even then something out of the ordinary about her. Maybe this is no more than hindsight. Maybe I'm reading more into my recollection of Laura that day six years ago, but . . . well, I don't think so.

Distinctly I recall saying to one of the other guests present that it was odd how ancient a six-week-old infant could look. Her eyes were not the eyes of a baby at all. In their grave and pensive calm they were beautiful—in fact, the only beautiful thing about her. Actually, she was very plain, if not ugly, with an uncommonly sallow complexion and stiff, black, porcupine-quill hair that sprang up all over her head as if she'd had a terrible fright. But she sat silent and observant while the cocktail party with its thirty-odd guests buzzed around her.

It seemed rather cruel to me to prop a small child up and leave her unattended for hours, and at one point during the afternoon I cornered Rose and asked if she didn't think the baby might be tired or hungry or just plain bored with us. Rose laughed and said not to worry about Laura. She was one little girl who was going to have all the advantages, and anyway, I didn't hear *her* complaining, did I?

It was true she was silent, but her eyes, glittering with a peculiar hollow depth, grabbed at each guest in turn. After a while she looked off into the distance as though she were brooding over all her invisible advantages, and I had the strange notion that her vision was not on the same level with mine or with anyone else's in that room; it was as if she had gone away and left her small perfectly formed body behind—as if, successfully disguised as a child, she had deceived us all.

The fortunes of life being what they are, James Halloran and I found our places separately in the world. I went on to my job as writer at the United Nations, and to teaching writing at NYU at night; and after his marriage he went into TV production—Halloran Enterprises. You see their packaged shows all the time on TV.

I didn't see the Hallorans for the next few years. I can't say that it was

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Rose's doing because I don't actually know. Maybe it's one of the unwritten and unspoken laws of marriage that the wife's friends become the family's friends, and the husband's friends just drift off until they are absorbed by somebody else's wife. In any case, I did feel bad about James. For a long time before Rose had come on the scene we'd been real buddies, footloose and free and enjoying that freedom. I'm still enjoying mine.

Maybe once or twice a year I'd run into James dashing along Madison Avenue—usually, he informed me, late for an appointment; or I'd see him at lunch with several other enterprising-looking young men in one of the better "businessmen's" restaurants uptown. I always made it a point to ask after Rose and Laura, particularly wanting details about the child; but James never had the time for much conversation. "They're fine—just fine," was about all I could get out of him. "We're not in the city any more, you know," he informed me. "We've built out in Westport. You'll have to come and see us."

Because I never really expected to see the Hallorans in their new setting, the invitation to the St. Patrick's Day cocktail party took me by surprise. And I must admit that a large part of my interest in going was plain curiosity—to see their new ten-room house in its nine-acre setting, to see Rose in her new role as a suburban housewife, and especially to see the little girl, Laura. Somehow I just couldn't forget those eyes.

The day, Sunday, turned out to be one of those harbingers of summer, rare but always welcome in March. The highways were as crowded as Coney Island on a torrid Fourth of July. I joined the parade of motorists and found myself, an hour and a half later, taking wrong turns on narrow country roads, and having to stop several times to make inquiries. James had told me they were out in the country, but I hadn't expected them to be quite so far out or to find their place carved so deeply into woods.

I turned in at the mailbox lettered Halloran, and drove for a good quarter of a mile before I saw the big columned colonial rising like a giant tombstone on a sward of green. The grounds were magnificent.

"You can't improve on nature," Rose Halloran said to me a short time later when I complimented their woodsy background.

"Then what was that eye-opening bill for from the landscape gardener?" James wanted to know.

"Why don't you get Morton a drink, dear," she said, and went to greet two other guests who were just arriving.

"Some place you have here, James," I said, taking the martini which the white-coated bartender handed me.

"Let's go into the living room." He led me into an immense room,

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drenched with color and light. An entire wall of glass gave onto the grounds behind the house. James slid open a glass panel and we stepped outside. 'Way off to the left I saw Laura's playground, her swing and sliding board, her doll house and Jungle Gym. I looked around. The little girl was nowhere in sight.

"Where's Laura?" I asked.

"She's here somewhere," James said.

"I'd like to see her again," I said. "She was only six weeks old when I saw her last."

"Good lord, is it that long?" James emptied his glass, and then he did a funny thing. With a sudden angry gesture he smashed the glass against a huge whitewashed boulder. "Rose'll be furious," he said, "but what the devil . . ." He picked up the largest pieces of glass and dropped them into his jacket pocket. "You ever wish you were back again at the old place, Mort?" he said as we ambled along toward Laura's playground. "I mean, the way it was before—before—"

I knew exactly what he meant, but there's no use in beating a dead horse. "Maybe it's not the same there either," I said, trying to smooth over the rough moment. "Things are always changing. Tell me about Laura. What's she like?"

"Like any six-year-old, I guess. Always into things. Tell me about your job at the UN, Mort. You get a chance at anything creative? Anything worthwhile?"

I started to tell him about the series of films we were doing for the World Health Organization, but I could see his mind trailing off, working on its own problems.

"Administrative work galls me," he said, digging his fists into his trouser pockets. "Ever try to juggle a dozen balls at once? That's about what it's like."

As we approached the swing I suddenly noticed Laura in it. I hadn't been aware of her before. But there she was, swinging high. We came to a stop alongside her.

"Your mother know your'e out here?" James asked her. "I think she wants you inside."

I tried to grasp the looks of the child, to see if she was the same as I remembered her—but she was swinging too fast, too high. All I could see was the mass of black hair that seemed too thick and heavy for so frail a child to support.

"Come down now, Laura," her father said.

Slowly the swing came to a halt. Laura waited until it had stopped altogether, and then she got off gingerly, as if her were stepping out of an elevsato into a strange room.

"This is Mr. Kershman, Laura," her father said. "He remembers you when you were a baby."

"How do you do," she said in a voice like a glass bell, and she held out a frail narrow hand. When I took it in my own it was soft and limp—like a stricken bird.

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I looked at her closely and decided she hadn't really changed much since I last saw her. She was still sallow and plain-looking, almost homely, with that matted black hair that seemed to weigh her down. But her eyes seemed to have increased in intensity; they were large and black and fierce. She looked like a child on whom some terrible blight had fallen. There was a faint air about her that took me back a long way—to a verse from my childhood.

Monday's child is fair of face,
Tuesday's child is full of grace . . .

"Was Laura born on a Wednesday?" I asked James suddenly, apropos of nothing we'd been talking about.

He gave me a peculiar stare. "Who in hell remembers?" he said.

Laura looked at her father in a curiously ravaged way. "You know Mother doesn't like swearing."

"Sorry," he said, and seemed to be apologizing to his wife instead of his daughter.

Wednesday's child is full of woe, I thought to myself, *and surely that is Laura.* "That's a very pretty dress you have on," I told her, and it was, all bows and tucks and flounces of a soft shade of green—pretty except that its color heightened her sallowness.

"Thank you," said her bell-like voice. "I wear quite a bit of green. Not just on Sibyl's birthday."

"Who's Sibyl?" I asked.

"Now, Laura," said her father in a sharp voice. "That will do."

She took a deep breath and let it out slowly, reluctantly, as if she were releasing her last breath on earth. Then she turned to me. "Will you excuse me, please? I'm needed inside."

I watched her go, her legs like moving sticks below the immense green bow across the middle of her back. She carried her head thrust forward in an attitude of attention, as if she were listening to something far away. I turned back to James.

"Who's this Sibyl that Laura mentioned?"

He batted the air with his hand. "Kids get the damnedest notions. Sibyl and Laura are supposedly inseparable friends. They eat, sleep, play, bathe, brush their teeth, go to school together." He paused as if giving emphasis to his next thought. "Rose has forbidden Laura to mention Sibyl again."

"Why? Nothing wrong with that," I said. "She's an imaginative kid, that's all. When I was her age I had the biggest and shaggiest dog you'd ever want to see. His name was Napoleon. He was all in my mind, of course."

"It gets a bit thick sometimes," he said, as if he felt he had to apologize for his wife. "Especially now that Sibyl's begun dictating to Laura—what to eat, what not to eat, what clothes to wear, what games to play, how to behave. You can see this has all sorts of—well, very strange possibilities."

As a matter of fact, I could see

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very interesting possibilities—but all as part of normal childhood. I was about to say so when James abruptly changed the subject, suggesting that we go in and meet some of the other guests.

The party was now humming like a beehive. The living room and adjoining dining room (where the bar had been set up) were dense with people. James introduced me to a little knot of them who happened to be standing near the entrance as we came in. I picked up another drink from a tray and listened in on the surface talk that always floats around like cigarette smoke at cocktail parties.

The truth is, I'm never really comfortable at these affairs. What can you say to people, meeting them for the first time? What's your line of work, Bud? How much are you good for a year? Have you had an idea lately? One that hasn't been handed to you fully predigested by a TV show or a movie or a newspaper editorial or a bestseller?

I tried to look interested in the interminable chitchat, but my eyes wandered to an intriguing bit of activity in a corner of the dining room. I couldn't see Rose's face; her back was toward me but it bent over in an ominous warning way toward Laura, who stood holding a small tray of hors d'oeuvres. The child's plain young face was made suddenly bright with hate. She stood there, odd and ancient, like a child who has been a child for centuries. Then her expression slowly hardened until it was a wall to keep herself from being exposed.

After a moment she moved off. I excused myself and went after her.

"Could I have a couple of those?" I asked, pointing to the dish of ripe olives on her tray.

She nodded and I took one.

"Make a wish," she said. "Count your olive pits. If they're even it's a good sign."

"I'll have to eat some more," I said, and took a few. "Why don't you have one, too?"

She shook her head. "Sibyl doesn't—" She stopped short.

"Tell me about Sibyl," I said.

Her dark gaze moved slowly over me. I had the most uncanny feeling. It was as if the child could look directly into my soul. Between us at that moment I felt some mysterious connection established. I was caught up in her look—caught up and held.

"She's naughty sometimes," Laura said.

"*All* children are naughty sometimes," I said, minimizing Sibyl's naughtiness. "At least from the grownup point of view. But of course you wouldn't be able to see that."

"I do see it. But I can't make her stop." In the depths of her eyes I saw plainly an instant's stricken look. It vanished at once and she looked down at the tray broodingly, abstractedly. "Do you like magic, Mr. Kershman?"

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"Love it," I said. "I used to do a few tricks myself."

She raised her great eyes. They began to burn in her fierce, fragile face. "What kind of tricks?"

"Oh, card tricks, sleight of hand. I could make a coin disappear, make a torn newspaper come whole again."

"Kid stuff," she scoffed. "I'm talking about *real* magic."

"I was never *that* good," I admitted.

She nodded agreeably, as if to say, "I understand. You couldn't be *that* good."

Then she said aloud, "Sybil's *extremely* good at magic."

"What can she do?"

She gave me a piercing and prescient look. "All sorts of things."

"For instance."

"You wouldn't believe me if I told you."

"Try me."

"I can't. Sibyl wouldn't like it if—"

The subject of Sibyl was abruptly cut off when from the kitchen door Rose summoned Laura. I watched the child move off with that same thrust of the head that I had noticed before—as if she were listening to something far away.

In the confusion of guests and drink and food I lost track of Laura and didn't see her until an hour or so later when I happened to be passing the bank of windows in the dining room that looked directly out on her playground. There she was in her swing, her dark hair flying out in all directions, her spindle legs pumping for all they were worth. I watched her moving forward and back, sitting on that slab of wood as lightly as a cloud, her tiny fingers curved like bird's feet around the swaying chains.

Swinging wildly, she went higher and higher. I got the feeling somehow that she was leaving us all behind. The swing and the sky over it became tamed, submissive. I was intrigued by their perfect rightness for her, the symmetry of it all. I felt a pull on my consciousness, an undertow of expectation, as if I were still a child waiting on a treat. I couldn't take my eyes off her.

And then, silently, implacably, it happened.

Yes, I'd had a few cocktails. Yes, I have an imagination. Yes, I felt a deep empathy with the child.

But none of these explain it.

Actually and physically, somewhere between the earth and the sky, she was erased, blotted out entirely. The empty swing continued its wild pendulum rhythm.

The last I saw of Laura, her head was turned expectantly to one side. A smile had developed on her face, enlarging, as she swung, to that gleeful expression that children reserve for communion with their most intimate playmate.

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DETECTIVE SHORT NOVEL—*complete in this issue*

Kelley Roos offers us a short novel with an unusual background and an unusual cast of characters—antique automobile collecting and the collectors who restore ancient motor cars to their once-sputtering glory—and even ride them on modern highways! If you are not an old-car buff (is that the proper term?), you will still be interested in the annual "meet" which brings together dozens of bygone cars—from the frail contraptions of the Nineties to the "fancy" models of the Twenties—a sort of historical Automobile Show with exhibitors dressed in old-fashioned dusters, veils, and goggles, with the horseless carriages polished and primed, their brass-topped radiators gleaming, their gas headlights (lamps, really) and running boards and flapping fenders making a quaint and colorful picture, nostalgic and curiously innocent — until murder strikes . . .

MURDER IN THE ANTIQUE CAR MUSEUM

by KELLEY ROOS

THE TRAFFIC COP BLEW THREE sharp blasts on his whistle and motioned violently, but he was grinning. The Saturday shoppers on the busy intersection's four corners were an audience enchanted by an unexpected comedy-drama of a day gone by. They craned their necks, shouted encouragement, and applauded the efforts of the show's leading lady.

Nancy Carter sat atop the ancient, high-wheeled horseless carriage and struggled desperately to get it into low gear. She cursed her audience for their rapt attention and blessed the long duster and wide-brimmed hat with its voluminous veil that hid her from their view. Then the stubborn gears responded, the Swensen Scat, model 1909, lurched forward. A gasp of relief burst from Nancy's lips, and the crowd cheered. Then the four-cylinder motor sputtered and died.

Nancy set her teeth and waited for the inevitable taunt. It came immediately. A loud, raucous voice shouted, "Get a horse!" The crowd roared with laughter.

Snatching the crank from the floorboards, Nancy climbed down from her seat. The policeman met her at the car's brass-topped radiator.

"Let me wind her up for you," he said.

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"No, thank you," she said coldly. "It might break your arm."

"What about your arm? A little thing like you!"

"I've been cranking these monsters for years. One side, please, Officer."

A few minutes later she was chugging out of the small New York town, once again on her way to Connecticut. Her cheeks were still flaming with embarrassment. Stalling on that corner had been the final indignity of her trip. She had had tire trouble, motor trouble, all the trouble possible. She was already hours late for the antique car meet at Harvey Worth's estate in Wexford. It would be over before she even got there.

Never, never again, she vowed, would she be caught aboard one of her father's playthings. Old cars were his hobby; let him put them through their paces. After having served sixteen of her twenty-two years as his grease monkey and, lately, his assistant driver, she had had just a little too much of the whole thing. But she had to laugh at her indignation; she wasn't being fair. She was making this trip for her own selfish, private reasons. She hadn't fooled her father on that point.

When he had been laid low by a nasty cold, she had made a noble gesture. She had offered to drive the newest addition to his collection in Saturday's meet. Her father had immediately seen through her nobility. He had known that it was because of Joel that she had made the offer. He had chuckled and wished her luck.

She had first met Harvey Worth's nephew on an old-car trek to Buffalo in the spring, and from then on he had practically taken over her social life. Theater dates in New York, country house parties in Vermont, Sundays at her home in Westchester, with Joel behaving toward Mr. and Mrs. Carter exactly like, Nancy had thought hopefully at the time, a future son-in-law.

And then, suddenly, without warning, no word from Joel at all. During sleepless nights she had tried to arrive at an explanation for his silence but without success. Something had happened and she had to know what.

She turned right off Route 29 and soon, from a rise in the road, she was looking down over the half-mile track that Harvey Worth had built on his property. She could see dozens of car models, ranging from the flimsy inventions of the eighteen nineties to the powerful elaborations of the nineteen twenties. She could see the owners, their families and friends, all dressed in dusters, veils, and goggles. It made a colorful picture, quaint and pretty.

At the moment the track was studded with brightly painted peach baskets. A flamboyant Stutz Bearcat was running the obstacles against time and, in spite of the driver's costume, she knew it was Joel driv-

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ing the car his uncle had given him. She urged the Scat to go a little faster.

When she reached the track she found the Bearcat parked, apart from the other cars, beneath an autumn-tinted oak. She pulled in beside it. She stood up behind the steering wheel and looked out across the crowd, which was roaring now as a pair of early Tin Lizzies raced each other on the track. She couldn't see Joel. But the Stutz was his; he was here some place.

Nancy jumped down to the grass and dodged through a quartet of enthusiasts gathering to inspect this rarity, a 1909 Scat. A voice called, "Hello, Miss Carter!" She turned and saw Charley Ball, Mr. Worth's elderly mechanic, smiling at her. "We been worried about you," he said.

"I had trouble on the way up, Charley. Do you want to buy a Scat?"

"So that's what it is! Where'd your father dig it up?"

"A secret agent of his found it down South. Father spent all summer restoring it. With my invaluable assistance, of course. I only handed him the wrong monkey wrench twice."

The old man chortled. "That's the way to your father's heart. Too bad about him coming down sick."

"It's nothing serious, Charley."

A smiling couple came walking toward them. The woman was perhaps in her early forties, but her face had the wide-eyed prettiness of a sub-deb. The duster she wore couldn't hide the lush curves of her small figure. Her veil was raised to the brim of her hat; it was a halo crowning a happy cherub.

The man, in costume too, was younger than she, pleasant, and a bit too good-looking. He was looking directly at Nancy with eyes that were at once curious and flattering. Nancy noticed the woman's hand tighten possessively on his arm.

"Charley," he said, "is this Nancy Carter?"

"Yes, it is, Randy. Miss Carter, meet Mrs. McLane and Randy Fuller."

"How do you do?" Nancy said.

"Randy's a new neighbor of ours," Charley said.

"And I'm an old neighbor," Mrs. McLane said. "An old, tired neighbor."

"Mrs. McLane," Charley said, "today you look sixteen."

Old Charley had said exactly what was expected of him. Sharon McLane glowed happily. "Why, Charley, I believe you mean that." She blinked her eyes coquettishly at Randy Fuller. "Did you hear what Charley said? Do you think I'm safe around him?"

"Now, now, Mrs. McLane," Charley said, embarrassed.

Randy laughed and turned back to Nancy. "I've been asked to look out for you."

"Thanks," Nancy said. "Where is Mr. Worth?"

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"He's gone back up the hill to tend to some business," Randy said.

"Such lovely, lovely business," Sharon McLane said. "You're just in time, Nancy, to help us celebrate after the meet."

"I'll do my best. What are we celebrating?"

"Harvey Worth is buying some land from my husband . . . but I'll let Harvey tell you all about it. He'd massacre me if I spoiled his fun."

"Oh," Nancy said, "then it's something to do with old cars."

"Of course," Sharon said. "You know Harvey."

"Nancy," Randy said, "it was Amy who asked me to watch for you."

"I'm anxious to meet Amy."

She had heard a great deal about Amy Shaw from Joel. Amy was Harvey Worth's stepdaughter. Her mother had died not long after their marriage, but Amy had stayed to grow up in the mansion on the hill. She and Joel had been playmates, then almost inseparable friends.

Charley Ball said, "Joel's here, too."

"Yes," Nancy said, "I saw his car. I suppose it's too late for me to race Mr. Worth's Hupp now."

"'Fraid so," Charley said. "They got three more races scheduled and not much daylight left."

"What's that you're driving, Nancy?" Randy asked.

"A Swensen Scat, 1909. It's my father's pride and joy. Only a few of them were ever made. They're as rare as a day in June."

"Well, it's a new one on me," Randy said. "I've never even heard of it."

"I've heard about them," Charley said, "but this is the first one I ever seen. Mrs. McLane, your husband had one once, didn't he?"

"No. It was Ward's cousin, Leo Frayne. That was years ago." Her eyes darkened and she gave a little sigh. "Dear Leo." Then her eyes were sparkling again. "This is such a lucky day for the McLane family. Maybe Leo will decide to come home again."

"All is forgiven," Randy said.

"Now, Randy." Mrs. McLane pouted girlishly. "You don't listen to gossip, do you?"

"Is there gossip?" Randy asked.

"Well, why did you say that?" She gave him a questioning sideways glance. "What have you heard about Leo and me?"

"Stop it, Sharon," Randy said, laughing. "Stop making yourself such a *femme fatale*."

"It's been so dull around here," Sharon said. "Until today. Now everything's wonderful! I don't care *what* people say about Harvey Worth. I think he's sweet. All that nice money . . ."

A voice through a megaphone bellowed out the next event. A turn of the century Olds with a *dos-à-dos* seat was to defend its honor against a single-cylinder Winton. Charley darted off, and Mrs. McLane, with

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Randy firmly in tow, moved closer to the track.

Nancy couldn't get interested in the races. She wandered through the crowd, nodding at people she'd met at other meetings. She didn't see anyone who might be Amy, and she didn't see Joel. She decided finally to go up the hill and check in with her host of the week-end. She was sure to see Joel later.

He was living now with his uncle. A year or two ago he had given up a job doing publicity for a New York publisher and had started a printing business, the Wexford Press. His enthusiasm and initiative seemed to be making up for his lack of business experience.

She backed her car away from the Stutz and started up the section of winding, dusty road that Harvey Worth had restored so that the old-fashioned cars could perform in their natural habitat. If her father was a fanatic about his hobby, Nancy thought, Worth was a raving maniac. She had seen a lot of him on the Buffalo jaunt, but she had heard him utter scarcely a word that didn't concern antique cars. He seemed to her an arrogant, ruthless old gentleman, but his interest in his hobby was disarming.

She was battling her way over the tricky ruts when the roar of a powerful motor pushed to its limit surged up the hill. In a moment, looking over her shoulder, she saw the machine rise out of the dust. It was the Stutz Bearcat. Nancy braked her car gently and smiled to herself. Joel had heard that she'd arrived; he was coming after her.

She slowed her car more, edging close to the deep ditch beside the road. She glanced back again. The Stutz wasn't slowing down. It seemed, instead, to be gaining more speed, to be hurtling straight at her.

Instinctively, Nancy wrenched the steering wheel to the right. Her light car slid into the ditch, teetering there, while she struggled to keep it from overturning. She saw the Stutz rush by, then the dust blinded her. Her car tilted slowly and she jumped clear of it, landing on her knees in the ditch. Above her the two left wheels spun helplessly in the air.

She climbed up onto the road and stood listening to the fading roar of the Stutz Bearcat. Abruptly the sound snapped off.

She clenched her hands to stop their trembling. In spite of the dust, she had seen the Stutz when it was a good fifty yards behind her, so Joel *must* have seen her car. The road here was wide enough for a safe passing, but he had deliberately driven her into the ditch. He must have known that she might have been badly hurt, yet he had rushed on without stopping.

It couldn't have happened, she told herself. There could have been no reason for its happening. But her Swensen Scat lay on its side in the ditch.

Her fright turned suddenly to anger. She slipped out of the dirt-

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stained duster, picked up her hat from the ditch, and threw them on the car. Then she started up the road, primed for battle. All she wanted was to get at Joel Worth. She'd show him. She'd roll him into a ditch and leave him with his wheels spinning in mid-air. And she wouldn't need a Stutz Bearcat to do it with, either. She'd do it with her bare hands—so help her, she would.

She was out of breath when she reached the top of the hill where the road stopped to form a T. One part of it rose gently toward a rambling stone house, the other sloped down to a big red barn. Before it, on the driveway, stood the Bearcat.

She started toward the barn, across a smooth green terrace of lawn, across a graveled apron of the barn's entrance. She moved toward the great double doorway, opening her mouth to call Joel's name. The rumbling sound of a voice stopped her dead.

It was Harvey Worth inside the barn, his voice cold with rage, each word a venomous dart: "Not one dollar, not one cent . . . don't come whining to me, you're wasting your time and mine . . ."

There was a silence and Nancy strained to hear Joel's voice in answer to his uncle's. But she heard only the old man's voice again, rising in a rage that seared its way through the barn's wall. "You got yourself into this mess, get yourself out of it . . . or take your punishment!"

She found herself backing hastily out of earshot, not wanting to hear any more, trying not to believe what she had already heard. It was impossible, all of it. None of it could have really happened—Joel driving her off the road, Joel in some trouble that involved the threat of punishment.

She stood watching the doorway, waiting for Joel to appear. But the doorway remained an empty rectangle and there was no sound at all from inside the great red building. Slowly, almost in spite of herself, she moved forward again until she stood inside the barn.

One half of it was a garage that housed the mobile section of Mr. Worth's hobby; the other half was a museum. There were a dozen or more oddities of the early auto age, impossible to restore to running order, but still collectors' items. There were wax figures in the motoring costumes of the period at the wheels of the cars and posed as passengers. But there was no sign of a living person.

Nancy walked farther into the barn. She walked past a humorous tableau of life-sized dolls, a family taking a Sunday outing in their touring car. She passed a towering, black sedan and in front of it she saw the crumpled body.

She dropped to her knees, reaching out her hand to the still figure, and then drew it back. She had seen the brutally beaten head and she knew at once that Harvey Worth had been murdered.

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Behind her a door opened quietly, then closed again. With a little cry she struggled to her feet and turned toward the sound.

"It's Mr. Worth," she said. "He's dead . . ."

It was a moment before she realized that there was no one with her in the museum, no one but the crumpled body at her feet and the lifeless figures grouped about the cars. The door had opened, not for someone's entrance, but for a murderer's escape.

She found the door beyond a partition built to form a sort of office. She flung it open and saw an empty stretch of lawn and the leafy, concealing curtain of the nearby woods.

She turned and ran back through the barn, out through the big front doors through which she had entered. Above a rise of land she could see the slate roof of Harvey Worth's house. She started across the roadway toward it, and then stopped.

The Stutz Bearcat was still standing in front of the barn. The car whose driver had forced her into a ditch, that had carried its driver to a furious quarrel with Harvey Worth. Joel's car! But it wasn't Joel who had been driving it.

Nancy had an unassailable certainty of that. Joel was not a murderer. But his car stood outside the museum and, inside, on the floor of the barn, his uncle lay killed.

She turned away from the house, and ran blindly, wildly down the road. There was only one thought in her mind now. She had to get to Joel, to warn him.

Before she reached the field the sound of the crowd drifted up to her and then, in a moment, she was darting through the chattering groups of people. She saw a tall, dark-haired young man, his cap and goggles swinging from his hand, detach himself from one group and start toward another. She called out to him. He turned and saw her and she stood stiffly, unable to move, as he came toward her.

"Nancy," he said, "they told me you finally got here."

"Joel," she said. "Oh, Joel."

"Nancy, what is it?"

"Your car—the Stutz—do you know where it is?"

He looked puzzled. "It's parked over on the other side of the track. Why, Nancy?"

"It wasn't you," she whispered. "I knew it wasn't you. But he took your car . . ."

"Who? Nancy, what's the matter?"

"It's your uncle." She took a deep breath. "He's dead, Joel. He's been murdered."

He looked at her, his face white and expressionless. "Where did it happen?"

"In the barn, the museum. I thought you were there, I thought you . . ." She hesitated and Joel grasped her shoulders.

"That I what, Nancy?"

"Someone drove me off the road. It was your car. I thought you were

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in it. And up there I heard your uncle . . . he was fighting with someone and I still thought it was you. But then when I found him dead, I knew I was wrong. I knew it couldn't have been you who—"

He put his arm around her. "I'll go up, Nancy. You needn't come."

But she followed him to a car, climbed in after him. She sat silently, hunched in a corner, as the car climbed the rutted road. They came to the place where the little Scat hung tilted over the ditch.

Joel's hands tightened on the steering wheel. "You might have been killed," he said, his voice hard.

They crossed the crest of the hill and the barn lay close below them, the Stutz Bearcat parked before it. Joel swerved in beside the Stutz and Nancy followed him into the building.

Only a little of the October dusk seeped into the barn; it was dark with shadows. She stood and waited until Joel flicked a switch and the place sprang into light.

She said, "By the sedan. The big black one over there."

He moved quickly through the maze of cars and mannequins to the sedan, then crouched down beside it. In a moment he rose and came back to her.

"There's no phone here, Nancy," he said. "Will you call the police?"

"From the house?"

He nodded, and she turned and left the barn and climbed the driveway to the big house beneath the ancient trees. There was a phone just inside the front door in the entrance hall, and in a moment she was telling the Wexford police that Harvey Worth has been murdered.

Joel was standing motionless beside the black sedan when she got back. She said, "Joel, they're coming. They'll be here soon."

"Thanks, Nancy. I should have told you to stay up at the house."

"No, Joel."

Outside there was the sound of cars pulling in beside the barn. Swift footsteps stirred the drive's gravel, then three men and two women came through the door.

A tall, dark, dramatically handsome girl wearing narrow black slacks and a white tweed jacket was leading the way. Behind her were Randy Fuller and the mechanic, Charley Ball, then Sharon McLane and, at her side, a short, heavy-set man.

The tall girl came directly to Nancy, her lovely face shadowed with concern. "Nancy," she said, "I'm Amy. We saw your car in the ditch down there. Are you all right?"

"Yes," Nancy said. "I'm all right. I . . ."

She felt Joel's hand on her shoulder. He said, "Amy, Harvey is dead. He's been murdered."

"Murdered!"

Amy's eyes closed and she swayed, and at once Joel was at her side. From Sharon McLane's lips burst a rasping, muffled cry. Her hands were covering her face.

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"No," she cried. "No, it isn't true! He isn't dead. He can't be dead!"

"Mrs. McLane!" Joel said sharply.

"Sharon!" The short man moved toward his wife and she whirled to face him.

"He's dead," she said between clenched teeth. "Did you hear that, Ward? Harvey's dead and now it's too late—"

"Sharon," he said again. He put his arm around her and the gesture was comforting, but his voice was a command. "Sharon, stop it. You mustn't do this."

"The police are coming," Joel said. "I'll wait here for them. The rest of you go up to the house."

Amy took a step toward the door, then turned back. She leaned against the radiator of an old museum piece. "I'll wait here with you, Joel," she said.

None of the others spoke. No one made a move to leave Joel alone with the responsibility of facing the police. They paced nervously, silently, about the vast, gloomy barn, avoiding the corner with the black sedan, but unable to remain motionless.

The tension grew until it became almost unbearable. Amy stepped forward suddenly with a little sob, then she walked jerkily across the room, out of Nancy's sight.

A great flood of weariness surged over Nancy. Her emotion was spent now. She felt cold with exhaustion. She moved back into the corner to a red racing car with its mannequin driver staring in dismay at a flat tire.

As she sank down on the car's running board, the great overhead electric lights flickered and the place was plunged into blackness. Sharon McLane screamed, then giggled in frightened hysteria. Other voices called out, and Charley Ball's rose above them.

"It's a fuse, I guess. I'll see to it."

It was quiet again except for the sound of Charley's footsteps as he cautiously made his way toward the fuse box. Nancy sat where she was, straining her eyes through the darkness. The huge doorway to the barn was visible, a gaping gray mouth.

Inside the barn she could make out nothing but the blurred shapes of automobiles and shadowy figures, the still ones that were mannequins, and the moving ones. She sensed a movement somewhere near her.

She said, "Charley, is it you?"

No one answered her, but she could hear a soft, slithering sound, nearer to her now. She got up from the running board and moved blindly forward a step or two. She said Charley's name again.

Still there was no answer. And now there was not even a whisper of a movement.

The blow came from behind her —a violent, powerful thrust that sent her sprawling to the floor. She screamed as she fell.

Footsteps moved rapidly and a voice was shouting, "Who screamed? What's wrong?" and another voice

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pleaded, "Charley, will you get those lights on?"

Nancy pulled herself to her knees as the lights slashed away the darkness. They were coming toward her, Joel and Amy and the others, their questions a frightening jangle. In the distance a police-car siren hummed higher and higher . . .

It was the second time in the past two hours that Nancy was seated across the desk from the bespectacled, gray-haired policeman. The first time that she had been summoned from the staid Victorian living room into Harvey Worth's study, she had been closeted alone with the Chief of Police. This time Joel was beside her on the leather couch.

The policeman centered his attention on Nancy. He said, "You've had more chance to think back now, Miss Carter. Do you still have no idea who was driving the Stutz when it forced you off the road?"

"No," Nancy said. "No idea at all."

"But it was a man?"

"Well, the person wore a man's cap. That's all I was able to see. It might have been a woman wearing a cap, goggles, and duster."

"I suppose so. Now about the quarrel . . . you say you only heard Mr. Worth's voice. Think back again, Miss Carter. You're sure you didn't hear him mention a name?"

"No. I'm sure I didn't."

The policeman rose from behind the desk, stood before Nancy and Joel. "I don't want to frighten you, Miss Carter. Let's say I want to help you by warning you."

"Yes, Mr. Kroll."

"Those lights going out in the barn was no accident. We found a blackened screwdriver on the workbench. It had been stuck into a socket to cause a short circuit. Someone blew that fuse for a reason. Maybe the reason was to kill you, Miss Carter."

Joel said quietly, "That's what I'm afraid of."

"No," Nancy said. "I'm sure that wasn't it. I—"

"What makes you so sure?" Kroll asked.

"I don't know exactly. But it was such—such an inept attempt if it was murder. You'd think he would have got his hand over my mouth so I couldn't scream . . ."

"He swung at your head," Joel said grimly. "And he missed."

"But it was more like a push, as though he were trying to get somewhere or do something, and I got in his way and stopped him. I'm sure that's all it was. Why would anyone want to kill me?"

"You saw the murderer when he passed you in the Stutz," Kroll said. "You heard the quarrel he had with Harvey in the barn."

"But I didn't see his face. I didn't hear his voice!"

The policeman's lips twisted in a humorless smile. "Have you told the

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killer that, Miss Carter? And did he believe you?"

There was a knock on the study door. A young, uniformed policeman came into the room, followed by Charley Ball. The mechanic's face was gray with strain.

The young policeman said, "Charley and I thought you'd want to know about this right away, Mr. Kroll."

"What is it, Wes? You find the weapon?"

"Well, no. It was something we didn't find, something that could have been the weapon, and it's gone now. Charley, you tell him about it."

"It's an old car part, a piece of a spring—a section of a spring leaf that was broke off," Charley said.

"It could have been used as a weapon?"

"Sure. A car spring isn't a coil; it's a layer of steel strips. This thing was broke off a foot long. It's a couple of inches wide, and heavy. It could kill a man, no doubt of that."

"Sounds like it might have been used on Mr. Worth. You mean this thing was broken off a car in the barn?"

"No," Charley said. "Some kids found it a couple of days ago over on the McLane property. In the mud by the edge of the lake. The kids brought it to Mr. Worth. They thought he'd be interested in it, and he sure was. He couldn't figure out what make of car it came from, and neither could I." Charley smiled wryly. "It made him mad not to know. He figured he knew everything there was to know about old cars."

"You're sure it was part of an old car?" Kroll said.

"Certain. Nowadays springs are pretty much the same, but in the old days, when practically every fellow that had a machine shop tried his hand at making a horseless carriage, there was a lot more variety in the cars. Some of the builders got pretty fancy. They might make the springs in a pretty design, or put some fancy etching on it. Like this one had. I'd say this one was real old. Probably made in the early nineteen hundreds."

"Did Mr. Worth keep it in any special place?"

"In that big wall case in the garage end of the barn."

"And when did you see it last, Charley?"

"Well, now," Charley said, "I seen it early this afternoon. When Mr. and Mrs. McLane stopped by on their way to the meet, Mr. Worth had me get it to show to them. But Ward McLane couldn't even guess what make of car it was from."

"Did you put it back in the case?"

"No, I was in a hurry to get down to the track. I left it on a bench in the garage."

Kroll said, "You ever see this thing, Joel?"

"Yes. My uncle showed it to

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everybody who came near the barn. It was driving him crazy, not being able to identify what car it came from."

"When did you see it last?"

"Yesterday when Harvey showed it to me."

"Well, it's possible nobody will ever see it again. Maybe the killer got it out of the barn. But maybe he didn't. Wes, is Hood still around?"

"Yes, sir."

"You and Hood go through that barn again. If that spring leaf or strip is there, you find it."

"Yes, sir," Wes said. He turned back at the door. "The McLanes and Mr. Fuller are still waiting. Will you be wanting them again?"

"I might. Tell them I haven't forgotten them."

After Wes had gone, Kroll turned to the mechanic. "But I won't be needing you any more tonight, Charley, and thanks."

"Anything I can do. Anything. Mr. Worth had his faults, but we—we got along."

"I know you did, Charley. Good night."

"Good night," Charley said, and closed the door behind him.

Kroll went back to the desk chair. He sat quietly for a moment, studying the blank green blotter before him. Then he sighed and moved forward in his chair.

"Joel," he said, "remember the times I used to chase you and your friends home late at night?"

"Sure. You kept us kids out of a lot of trouble."

"I knew your uncle twice as long as I've known you—you or Amy. He was a pretty good friend of mine, Joel."

"I know that, sir."

"Right now I wish I wasn't Chief of Police." He took a long breath. "Joel, Ward McLane told me about your uncle's plan to buy his land. The deal was all set. Eighteen thousand dollars for the seventy acres. They were going to sign the papers this evening. But your uncle was killed before he could do that."

"Yes," Joel said carefully. "Yes, he was."

"You and Amy are your uncle's heirs, Joel."

"That's right."

"That might make you interested in how he spent his money."

Joel didn't move. Very quietly he said, "I suppose you had to say that."

"I know how you felt about Harvey buying that land. When you heard the news from Sharon McLane at the meet this afternoon, you blew your top, didn't you, Joel?"

"Yes," Joel said. He was making an effort to keep his voice steady. "Yes, I blew my top. That land isn't worth one thousand dollars, you know that. The railroad ruined it, the embankment turned it into a swamp and lake. You know what he wanted it for—to reconstruct the old turnpike that runs through

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it, so he could play with his cars on it. I thought that was going too far with a hobby. It would have been a childish squandering of money."

"Of money that would some day be yours." The old man waved down Joel's attempt to speak. "It made you so mad, Joel, that you left the meet."

"Yes. I took a walk to cool off."

"But did you cool off, Joel? You knew Harvey had come up here to phone his lawyer. He wanted the papers drawn up right away for the land deal. Maybe that made you even hotter. So hot that you jumped in the Stutz and roared up that road—"

"No!" Nancy said. "It wasn't Joel!"

"You said it could have been anyone, Miss Carter. All right, Joel, suppose you found Harvey in the barn and had a row with him over the money. Suppose you lost your head, you didn't know what you were doing—"

"No!" Joel said. "Look, Mr. Kroll; it doesn't make sense. If I'd gone up to the barn to commit a murder, would I have roared up in my *own* car and left it standing there afterward? Everyone knows the Stutz is mine."

"I don't think you planned to murder him, Joel. I couldn't think that of you. But if you did, then you'd know that your car had been seen. Your one chance would be to sneak back to the meet through the woods and hope that everyone would think just what Miss Carter here is saying—that it was someone else in your car."

"It wasn't Joel," Nancy said firmly. "I *know* it wasn't Joel."

"I hope you're right, Miss Carter. I wish you could *prove* you're right." He turned to Joel and his smile was sad. "I'm sorry to have to say these things, Joel. You know that, don't you?"

"Yes," Joel said. "You're sorry, but still you're accusing me of murder."

"At the moment I'd say accusing is too strong a word."

"All right," Joel said. "What happens now? Do I get myself a lawyer?"

"Right now you and I will talk to each other a little more. Maybe we can even find you an alibi." He rose and put his hand under Nancy's elbow, propelling her toward the door. "That's all for now, Miss Carter. I think it's time you got a little rest."

She glanced back over her shoulder, past the closing door. Her eyes met Joel's, and she tried to return his smile of reassurance.

Then the door closed . . .

In the gloomy, chilly cavern of a living room the four people were seated before a dying fire. Their eyes were all on Nancy, asking her the questions; but it was Amy who put it into words.

"What are they doing in there, Nancy?"

"Mr. Kroll . . . he's trying to

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help Joel. But it's worse than if he were being rough."

Randy Fuller said, "But he can't think that Joel murdered—"

"He is thinking that," Nancy interrupted. "Exactly that."

"He's a stupid old man," Sharon said. "A stupid, small-town cop."

"You know he isn't," Amy said. "That's what makes it so horrible. If he can believe it . . ."

Her voice trailed off and she sank back on the divan. No one spoke. Then Sharon was moving to the table by the windows. She tilted a decanter of brandy toward a glass.

Gently, Ward McLane said, "Don't pour yourself another drink, Sharon."

She answered him without even looking in his direction. "Of course I won't pour myself another one, dear, if you say so." She put the decanter back on the tray. "Randy will pour it for me. Won't you, Randy?"

"Now, Sharon," Randy said uneasily.

Amy rose quickly. "Nancy, you should have some food."

"No, thanks, Amy."

"A cup of tea, maybe? Is there anything I can do?"

"I'd like to lie down a while. I'm a little shaky."

She climbed the broad stairway to her room. Her overnight bag was still in the ditched Scat, but Amy had been thoughtful. Pajamas and a robe were folded over a chair. She took a hot bath that did nothing to soothe her jangled nerves.

She started to get into the pajamas, then knew that sleep was impossible. She dressed again and tried to rest on the chaise longue. In a moment she knew that even that was a mistake. She was only torturing herself waiting in her room, wondering what was happening in the study downstairs.

She slipped quietly down the stairs and into the living room. Randy and Amy were standing before the fireplace; the McLanes were gone. The door to the study stood open and the lights in the room were out. Nancy looked silently from Amy to Randy Fuller.

Randy said, "Mr. Kroll has taken him into town, Nancy."

"Taken him . . . you mean he's charging Joel with murder?"

"It's not that bad yet. The case goes beyond Kroll's jurisdiction; the State Police are moving in now. Joel's gone to talk to them."

Nancy said, "What are we going to do? What can we do?"

"Wait," Amy said hopelessly. "Just wait."

"We've got to do something," Nancy said. "Amy, you were down there at the meet when Joel's car was taken. You were, too, Randy. Didn't you see anyone? Try to remember—can't you remember?"

Miserably, Amy shook her head.

"There were almost three hundred people there, Nancy," Randy said. "And so many cars, so much confusion. Joel's car could have been

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taken without anyone noticing it."

"But surely someone must have seen Joel, someone must be able to give him an alibi. We've got to find—"

"We're trying to, Nancy," Randy said. "Five members of the club are calling everyone who was at the meet. We're trying to find an alibi for him."

"Nancy," Amy said softly, "are you in love with Joel?"

"Yes," Nancy said.

"Has he told you that he loves you, Nancy?"

"No—no, he hasn't."

Then unsaid words burned Nancy's throat. "You tell me, Amy, you tell me that he loves me . . . you'd know, Amy, you must know" . . . but Amy wasn't even looking at her. She was moving toward a table, picking up a cigarette, lighting it.

It was Randy who spoke, quickly, "I'll be running along, Amy. Unless there's something more I can do."

"No, you've been fine, Randy."

His smooth, pleasant face was grim. "I promised our committee of five that I'd be at home if they needed me. Good night, Amy. Nancy. I'll be over in the morning."

Amy saw him to the door. Nancy heard the click of a lock and then Amy was standing in the living room's archway. "Let's make ourselves some coffee, Nancy," she said. "There's no use trying to sleep, is there?"

"No. I'd like some coffee."

She sat on a high stool in the square, old-fashioned kitchen while Amy rummaged through the larder. Soon Amy had scrambled eggs and toasted muffins, made a pot of coffee. She put a heaping plate before Nancy, and sat down across the table from her.

She lit a cigarette and immediately stubbed it out with fingers that were shaking. The shock of murder had seared the beauty from her face, leaving it strained and haggard. Her long, smooth black hair had become undone and was tumbling down her shoulders. Her eyes were almost blank with fatigue.

Gently, Nancy said, "We've all been so worried about Joel that we've almost forgotten . . . I mean, Mr. Worth meant a great deal to you, didn't he, Amy? He was your family."

"Yes. He was all the family I can remember."

"I'm so sorry, Amy, I—"

"Don't," Amy said. "Don't feel sorry for me, Nancy. I haven't lost someone I deeply loved. Oh, for years people have said that Harvey was just like a father to me. It isn't true. He wasn't. He was basically selfish. His generosity to me always had its price. He gave only what he wanted to give and he demanded that you be grateful, endlessly grateful. And in the last few years, since he's been interested in his cars, it's been worse. He's been like a child, a mean and spiteful child. He forced people to play a

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game he wanted to play. That Stutz Bearcat wasn't a gift to Joel. It was Harvey's idea of a bribe that would trap Joel into being grateful and acquiescent."

She was silent for a moment, her eyes brooding. "That car . . . if Harvey hadn't given it to Joel . . ."

"Amy, don't. They won't hold Joel for murder. He's innocent—we both know that. They'll find it out, too."

Amy didn't answer and Nancy said, her voice rising in disbelief, "You don't think, Amy, that Joel—you must know that it wasn't he."

"Of course I know," Amy said harshly. "It wasn't Joel, it wasn't any of us who killed him. It was an outsider, someone who stole the car to get to the barn, who sneaked inside and . . ."

Nancy shook her head. "No, no one sneaked into the barn. Whoever it was, Amy, roared right up to it in the Stutz. He fought with Mr. Worth before he killed him. Remember, I heard them quarreling."

"Yes," Amy said softly. "If it had been Joel, that's just what he would have done—roar up to the barn, storm into it. But the murderer didn't do that. He cut the motor at the top of the hill and drifted down to the barn. Because he was a stranger, an outsider."

"Yes," Nancy said, "that's right."

She remembered now how she had stood in the road beside the ditch and listened to the Stutz charge up the hill away from her. She had heard the sound of its motor suddenly cut off, too soon for it to have reached the barn. It had happened as Amy said; the motor was cut at the top of the hill, and the car rolled silently down the roadway to its destination.

"If they'd let Joel alone," Amy said, "if they'd look for the murderer."

She rose wearily and carried the two cups to the stove, relit the fire under the coffeepot. Nancy swung around to face her. "Amy," she said, and stopped. She had told no one that the engine of the Stutz had been turned off at the top of the hill; until now she hadn't even realized it had happened.

But Amy had known.

Amy turned away from the stove. Her eyes met Nancy's and her face tightened.

"What is it, Nancy?"

"How did you know about the motor, Amy? How could you have known?"

"I didn't know. I was guessing, trying to figure out . . ."

"You knew, Amy. And you couldn't have known unless it was you driving the car."

"No!" She was close to Nancy now, her hands gripping Nancy's shoulders. "You're wrong. I didn't drive that car."

"But you knew its motor had been cut. How did you know that, Amy?"

"I . . . All right, I'll tell you. I was in the barn. I was the one you

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heard quarreling with Harvey. But I didn't kill him. He was all right when I left."

"You were there," Nancy said. "Why haven't you told the police that?"

"What good would it have done? I didn't see anyone, I don't know anything. I walked up through the woods to see Harvey, I left through the side door. I didn't see Joel's car. I couldn't help by telling."

"You could help Joel. They think he was fighting with his uncle. You could tell them it wasn't Joel; you could prove it to them!"

"I . . . yes, but if I did that . . ."

"I know!" She tried to keep herself from shouting at the tall, cold-eyed girl. "You could help Joel, but it brings you into the picture. No one knows that you needed money desperately, do they? They don't know that you begged Harvey Worth for it and he refused you. You're afraid to have that known; you'd rather let Joel be—"

"Nancy!" Amy's voice was a lash. "You're hysterical. Stop, and listen to me."

There was a frantic knocking at the kitchen door and Amy moved quickly across the room toward it. She snapped back the bolt, and Sharon McLane slipped through the opening door. Sharon's eyes were dull and red-rimmed, and the vivacious prettiness was gone from her face. She was breathing in short gasps that shook her small, full figure.

"I saw the light. Please forgive me, but I had to see you, Amy."

"Sharon, you came through the woods alone!"

"I had to come. Ward . . . he'd be furious if he knew I was here. We've had an awful fight. He mustn't know about this, Amy. But I couldn't sleep, I couldn't rest. I've got to know what you mean to do."

"Do?" Amy said. "About Joel, you mean?"

"About the land that Harvey was going to buy. Ward's land. No papers were signed, you know that. We've got no legal hold over you at all. It was only a verbal agreement between Harvey and Ward, but it was an agreement. Everyone knows about it."

She was rattling on inanely, saying lines that she apparently had rehearsed. "You're going to honor it, aren't you, you and Joel? You do feel that you should, don't you?"

Nancy looked from the pleading woman to Amy and saw that she was too shocked to speak at once. There was something frightening about Sharon McLane. It was as if a soft, playful little animal had suddenly been driven mad by desperation and was clawing wildly for its life.

"Sharon," Amy said flatly, "you're out of your mind—wanting an answer about this, at a time like this."

"I know that, I realize that, and I ask your forgiveness. But I must hear you say that you will go through with it."

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"Sharon"—Amy's voice had become gentle—"I can't make a decision like this without Joel. It's too much money for me alone to promise."

"But it isn't! It isn't so much. Not to you. You'll be rich now, you and Joel, with all of Harvey's money. Eighteen thousand dollars . . . why, for you that'll be like nothing. But for us . . . Amy, it means everything. We've counted on it, we've—"

"I know, I understand, but—"

Sharon went on as though Amy hadn't spoken. Her eyes were blazing with excitement. She was an inspired saleswoman, now wheedling, cajoling.

"Look, Amy; eighteen thousand is too much for the land, I know that. But that's all you'll have to spend on it now. It's different now that Harvey's dead. Oh, I don't blame you for fighting the deal before. I know why you did, you and Joel. Harvey would have used up thousands and thousands of dollars more, draining the lake, fixing up the old turnpike that's under it. It would have been a stupid, sinful waste of money, I agree with you. But it's not like that now. Now it's just the eighteen thousand you'll be spending. You can't be against that."

The kitchen door opened quietly, but Sharon McLane seemed to have sensed her husband's presence. She wheeled to face him, then just as quickly backed away.

He spoke sadly, reproachfully, "Sharon, you promised me. I'm ashamed of you."

"You're ashamed!" Her words were a sneer. "I'm the one who's ashamed. Coming here on my knees, begging for charity."

"Sharon! Amy, I'm sorry. You know that she doesn't mean this. She's upset, just as all of us are. She isn't greedy or heartless or—"

"Greedy!" Her laughter exploded harshly. "I'm the one who's greedy! You can say that to me. If it wasn't for your greed I wouldn't be here now. We could have sold the land months ago. Harvey offered you ten thousand for it then and I begged you to sell, I pleaded with you to sell. But you had to hold out for eighteen. You were so sure you'd get it, so sure you'd make a killing! And now Harvey's dead and we'll get nothing! Amy and Joel won't buy the land now. Why should they? We'll get nothing, not a penny."

She broke down then and the tears gushed up into her eyes. Ward was instantly beside her, his arm around her shoulders, his voice soothing. With shocking vehemence she thrust him away.

"Don't touch me," she said. "I wish I'd never seen you. I should never have—"

"Don't say it, Sharon." Ward McLane was angry now. He was no longer the pleading, painfully embarrassed husband. His sarcasm was as cold and sharp as an icicle.

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"I'm tired of hearing you say that you should never have married me. It isn't news to me any more. I know who your present man-I-should-have-married is."

"You're being hateful."

"This year you're holding hands at cocktail parties with Randy Fuller."

"Randy's charming and gracious. He—"

"The whole list is charming and gracious, starting with my charming and gracious cousin."

"Leo was more than that, he meant more than that to me. Leo is strong and intelligent. He doesn't have your small-minded greediness. He would have sold the land in the beginning, he wouldn't have held out."

"Leo couldn't be bothered about the price of anything. He doesn't care about anything, or anyone."

"That isn't true! Leo does care."

"Sharon, stop. He's been gone almost ten years. In all that time I've heard from him twice. Twice in ten years. And you—you've heard nothing from him."

"Because he knew I'd married you. That's why he's stayed away. If I'd waited for him . . . Some day he'll come back and then—"

"Sharon, my dear." The angry fire had died out of Ward McLane. His voice was tired and heartbreakingly sad. "I hope he does come back. To have him back I'd give up anything in the world. Even you, Sharon. Now let's go home."

Sharon buried her face in her hands, her shoulders heaving with sobs.

Amy said, "Did you drive here, Ward?"

"No, Amy."

"I'll take you both home then."

"Don't bother, please."

"She can't walk all that way, Ward. My car's out front."

Amy shepherded the McLanes out into the hallway. At the door she turned back to Nancy. "Don't wait up for me. You've got to get some rest."

Amy was right, Nancy thought grimly, she did have to get some rest. But she knew that she would wait up. She dreaded the prospect of facing Amy alone again, but it had to be done. For Joel's sake Amy had to go to the police; she had to confess to them that it was she, not Joel, who had quarreled with Harvey Worth just before his death.

She moved restlessly about the first floor of the unfamiliar house. Somewhere the servants were sleeping. She was not alone in the great, silent place; there was no reason to be jittery. But she was. She kept roaming from the front door to the kitchen door, listening, peering out into the night, waiting for Amy to return.

At last she heard the front door open and close, and she hurried out into the hall. Joel, his dark hair rumpled, his face weary, was stand-

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ing there. When he saw Nancy he straightened his shoulders and smiled at her.

"Baby," he said, "why didn't you stay home and not get mixed up in this awful mess?"

"Joel, they've let you go! That means—"

He shook his head. "It only means that I can sleep in my own room instead of a cell. I don't know why. Maybe they want me to incriminate myself even more by trying to get away."

"No, Joel! They must realize by now that you're innocent."

"Don't hope so hard, Nancy, please don't. I don't like seeing it mean so much to you, because . . . well, because I can't prove a thing. I can't prove that I wasn't driving that car, or that I wasn't fighting with Harvey."

"Joel, I—I can prove that!"

"Prove what, Nancy?"

"That it wasn't you. It was Amy, Joel. She was the one in the barn fighting with Harvey."

He didn't speak for a moment. Then he said quietly, "How do you know that?"

"She made a slip and I—I caught her up. She's afraid to tell the police, afraid she'll get herself in trouble. But she's got to tell them—we've got to make her. If she won't do it, I will."

"No, Nancy, you won't. You won't tell them anything."

His voice was so cold that she stepped back, almost frightened.

"Joel," she said, "it's true. Amy admitted it to me. You ask her. She'll tell you, herself."

"She doesn't have to. I knew she was there."

"You knew! But then why . . .?"

"Because I don't want her involved. She had nothing to do with Harvey's death and I won't have her mixed up in it."

"But she *is* involved, can't you see that? She was with Harvey just before he died. And they were quarreling, Joel. She was begging him for money—money that she must have needed desperately—and he refused her."

"Did she tell you why she needed money, Nancy?"

"No, I—I didn't ask her."

He smiled crookedly. "She wouldn't have told you if you had. Amy's like that. But I'll tell you. She didn't need any money and she wasn't in any trouble. She was doing it for me."

"For you?"

"Yes. She made up a story about herself that she hoped would melt Harvey. Well, it didn't. You heard him. He wouldn't help her any more than he would me."

"She was trying to get money for you?"

"That's right, Nancy. I was the one who needed money. Don't look so stricken; lots of people need money."

"Lots of people aren't being suspected of murder. Joel, do the police know about this?"

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"Not yet. Nancy, it's all right. I can take care of myself."

"Are you sure you're taking care of yourself? If Amy went to the police, if she admitted she was in the barn . . . ?"

"No. I won't let her do that."

"I see," Nancy said softly. "Amy must be kept out of this, no matter what it does to you. That's it, isn't it?"

"That's it exactly. You understand, don't you?"

"Yes. Yes, I think so, Joel." She turned away from him, walked to the foot of the stairs. "She . . . I think Amy's a wonderful person, too."

"Yes. She'd go to the police if I'd let her. I've made her promise that she wouldn't."

"I misjudged her. I'm sorry."

"Nancy, you shouldn't be going through all this. I've talked to the police about you. You can go home in the morning."

"Go home?"

"Yes. I've called Randy Fuller; he's going to drive you back. Good night now, Nancy."

"Good night, Joel."

"Nancy . . ."

She turned back to him. "Yes?"

"I'll see you before you leave."

"Yes. Good night, Joel."

She walked away from him, up the stairs. Her room was dark. She didn't bother to turn on the lights. Undressing quickly, she got into bed. She heard the front door open, and the murmur of voices, Joel's and Amy's. Then the sound of them drifted out of her hearing.

Almost immediately there was a sharp knocking at the front door. Nancy found herself on her feet, moving to the head of the stairs to see who it was coming to the house so long after midnight. She heard the door open and Joel speak.

"Hello, Wes. Come in."

"Thanks, Joel." Nancy recognized the voice of the young policeman. "Could I use your phone?"

"Sure," Joel said.

"What is it?" Amy asked. "What's happened?"

"Ed Hood and I found the weapon, Miss Shaw. A jack handle. We found it under some junk behind the barn."

"You're sure," Amy said, "that was what was used to . . . that it is the weapon?"

"Pretty sure. There are stains on it that look like blood. It'll have to be proved at the lab, of course, but it's the weapon, all right."

There were the clicks of a phone dial then, and the policeman made his call. When he hung up, he said, "We're going to knock off now, Ed and I. They're sending a car over to pick us up."

"Do you and Ed want to wait up here until it comes?" Joel said.

"No, thanks. I told them to pick us up at the barn. Good night."

The door was closed and Nancy heard the lock being snapped. She went back to her room, closed her

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door. The weapon that had murdered Harvey Worth had been found. But it would do nothing to help Joel. The murderer's fingerprints wouldn't be on it. The driver of the Stutz had been wearing goggles and a duster. Surely he had been wearing gloves, too.

If there were any prints at all on the jack handle they would be old ones—the mechanic's or Harvey Worth's—or Joel's.

Nancy heard Amy's footsteps on the stairs; then, in a moment, Joel was on his way to his room. The great mansion on the hill lay in silence at last, and now all the horror of the day flooded back.

The Stutz roaring by, Harvey Worth lying dead in the barn. The nerve-torn group that waited for the arrival of the police. The great barn plunged into darkness, the attack on her that the police believed to have been an attempt on her life.

Nancy shivered beneath the warm blankets and snuggled deeper in the bed. They were wrong, she told herself; no one had wanted to hurt her. Someone had meant to do something under the cover of the darkness, but he hadn't tried to kill her. She had risen from the running board of the old racing car, moved a few steps forward, and she had been in his way. That was why he had hit her, hard and sharp, on her back.

She sat up straight in her bed, swung her feet to the floor. She forced her mind back to that moment before the lights had flickered and gone out.

She had been alone in that corner of the building, watching the others. From where she stood she had watched them, all of them, as they restlessly paced the floor. She had lost sight of one or another of them from time to time as they roved behind the towering cars.

But no one had approached her, no one had moved behind her. The blow had come from behind—from directly in back of her.

She knew then that she had been wrong in her reasoning. It wasn't because she had interrupted her assailant in his attempt to do something that she had been attacked. Whatever his mission was, it had already been accomplished. It was because she had interfered with him as he was trying to *return* from that mission, *to get back into an innocent position*, that he had struck her to the floor.

She tried to remember what there had been in the corner behind her.

There was the old racing car with the single mannequin stooped over one of its wheels. And that was all.

She had noticed nothing different about either the car or the figure after the lights had come on. But the killer had blown a fuse in order to get to that corner, and she had to know why.

Nancy rose and went over to her window. Across the long, shadowy lawn she could see the barn and, in front of it, the dark figures of the

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two policemen, their cigarette tips glowing.

She stood by the window, waiting, and in a few minutes she saw a car pull in before the barn. The two men climbed into it and the car backed out of the drive, turned, and disappeared down the hill.

She reached for her lamp, then decided against turning it on. She groped for her clothes, and dressed.

Quietly, she slipped into the hall and down the stairs. She felt her way to the front door, eased it open. Amy's car was parked beneath the portico. She ran to it, praying for a little luck, and found it. In the glove compartment there was a small flashlight.

She didn't use the light until she had rounded the corner of the barn. Then she clicked it on, sprayed the red wall of the building with it. The barn had been closed up tight. She moved toward the small door, built into the larger ones. There was no lock on it and it opened easily.

Inside the barn she flicked her light over the cars and the mannequins that seemed to be standing guard over them. It hit the old racing car in the corner and the figure stooped beside it. She moved toward them.

Methodically, she searched the floor of the car, the running boards, the crevices of the two seats. She opened the hood, flashed her light over the engine and found nothing out of place. She turned to the mannequin then, sweeping it with light from its goggled eyes to its high buttoned shoes. She moved closer to it.

There was something about the mannequin that bothered her—and now she knew what it was.

Before, the figure had been a motoring Beau Brummel bent over a wheel in an exaggerated posture of exasperation that dramatized the endless tire trouble of the early days. It was no longer a man in frustrated inaction. Now it was a man at work. He had begun to change the tire. A tool had been lodged in his hand. Now he was using a tire iron.

Quickly, she stooped to pick up the strip of metal and she knew at once it was not a tire iron. It was part of an old spring, the spring leaf that Charley Ball had reported stolen from the barn.

She held her light closer to the piece of steel, turning it over in her hands, and she recognized its make. It was identical in size and shape and design to the one in the car that she had helped her father restore. She knew that she would have been able to identify the old car part that had puzzled Harvey Worth. She could have told him that it had come from a Swensen Scat.

She stood looking at it, frowning, trying to understand. This spring had not been used to murder Harvey Worth—the weapon that had killed him already had been found. Was it in order to conceal

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this piece of worthless metal that the fuse had been blown, the barn plunged into darkness?

Was it after the spring had been hidden here that she had got in the murderer's way, and he had thrown her to the floor?

Had he risked all that in order to keep this piece of metal from being seen?

Holding the spring leaf tight, she started for the door. Joel might understand what it meant, he might be able to figure out its importance.

Halfway across the barn she stopped. Her light had picked out the tableau of mannequins on their gay Sunday outing. When she had passed it on her way to the racer it had been a family of four—a father, a mother, two children, all in dusters, all with veils or goggles.

Now as she centered her light, she saw a fifth figure bent over in front of the tool chest on the running board, its back to her.

She told herself that she was wrong, that the fifth figure had been there all the time; it had merely escaped her notice. Her light still shone directly on it. It was stiff and motionless, as still as the other figures in the car.

She lowered the light. The figure wore dark trousers beneath the duster. Or were they women's slacks?

She took another step toward the door and the fifth figure somehow changed. It hadn't been anything as perceptible as motion. It had been a tensing, as if now the fifth figure was set to strike, to leap out at her . . .

(*Continued on page 104*)

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a new Minerva Club story

EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR:	**VICTOR CANNING**
TITLE:	***Three Heads Are Better Than One***
TYPE:	Crime Story
LOCALE:	London
TIME:	The Present
COMMENTS:	*The third in a new series—how the three Heads made preparations for their sister's wedding—champagne, trousseau, wedding dress and wedding cake . . .*

WHILE THE MINERVA CLUB CERtainly cannot claim to be the most respectable in London, it is without doubt the most exclusive club. Birth, rank, education, wealth, or sporting interests will get you into most clubs—but not into the Minerva. Its membership is limited to those who have served at least two years in one of Her Majesty's Prisons and who can, if elected, pay—no questions asked how—yearly dues of £50.

Honorable behavior prevails inside, and no shop talk is allowed except in the smoking room after six o'clock in the evening. In this smoking room some of the cleverest criminal schemes have been devised by brains which, had they been directed to legitimate exploits, would have produced great captains of industry and successful politicians.

Only once has the decorum of the Minerva Club been disturbed and that was when some unknown guest stole the little gold statuette of the Goddess Minerva which used to stand on a small plinth outside the smoking-room door. The statuette was presented by one of the founder members, Maxy Martingale, famous in his day as a confidence man, to commemorate his selling of the Eros Statue in Picca-

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dilly Circus. However, not all the members of the Club have the brilliance of a Martingale. Some—like the Head brothers—are just solid, hard-skulled citizens who do their best in the lower walks of criminal life.

Horace Head, once well-known as a pugilist, was a thickset, bonehead man of about forty-five, with crisp gray hair and an engaging smile which split his broad face from cauliflower ear to cauliflower ear. His younger brother, Hubert Head, once a not quite so well-known pugilist, was also a thickset, boneheaded man, about forty-three, with crisp gray hair and an engaging smile. And his youngest brother, Harold, once a pugilist of even lesser renown, was a man of forty-one, thickset, boneheaded, with crisp gray hair and . . . well, what does it really matter?

At this particular moment the three Head brothers were sitting in the smoking room of the Minerva Club, each with a large whiskey in front of him, each considering the problem of their sister's wedding. Their sister was Marion Head who was a quiet-mannered, striking brunette of twenty-six, tall, beautifully proportioned, and the apple of her brothers' eyes.

This Marion, who beneath her quiet manner had a will of her own, had fallen in love with a member of the Minerva Club named Tony Risco. Tony was a dark-haired, self-contained, Latin-looking type who had a not inconsiderable reputation for forgery—a real artist and an educated man with the poise of an aristocrat. None of the Head brothers liked him, partly because—good Anglo-Saxon stock themselves—they distrusted all Latins, and partly because they seldom understood what he was talking about and, anyway, they thought he was a sissy.

The very idea of their sister married to Tony Risco made them squirm with inarticulate agony. They couldn't understand how Marion could have fallen for him. Horace had, in fact, once suggested that she should see a doctor. But Marion loved Tony, and Tony loved Marion, and the Head brothers were up against it, particularly Horace who, as the oldest, was the head of the family—Papa and Mama Head were long dead.

Horace took a long pull at his whiskey and said, "I've done everything I can."

"Me, too," said Hubert.

"He won't rise," said Harold.

"Nothing in him," said Hubert.

"Be like punching a paper bag," said Horace.

What all this meant, of course, was that in order to break up the engagement the Head brothers had, in their limited way, tried to provoke Tony so that he could be frightened off. They had played tricks on him and insulted him in

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front of Marion—and Tony had taken it all with a smile.

They had once put a feather pillow under the hood of his car when he had taken Marion out for a drive—but he wouldn't be smoked off. They'd put buckets of water above doorways for him, pinned insulting lables on the back of his coat unknown to him, made him sit in trick chairs, doctored his drinks—in fact, pulled all the corny practical jokes they could think of; and the only reaction from Tony had been dignified and mildly reproving monologues which went completely over their heads.

Tony had stuck to Marion, and Marion had finally fixed the date of the wedding, and at a time when the Head brothers were hard put to find £10 between them, had informed them that they were responsible—particularly Horace, as head of the family—for the cost of her wedding.

She wanted a wedding dress, a trousseau, a reception—complete with wedding cake and champagne—in the Ladies' Annex of the Club, and they'd better get busy about it.

"She means it, you know," said Horace.

"She does," said Hubert.

"That she does," said Harold.

"We've got to face it," said Horace. "She's going to get hitched to that spineless wonder."

"Remember Ma?" said Hubert. "She's just like her. Once she makes up her mind, there's no shifting her."

"That's right," said Harold.

"Okay, then," said Horace. "If she's going to do it, then we've got to see her right. Wedding dress, trousseau—what's that?"

"Sheets and things for the bed, I think," said Hubert.

"No, underclothes," said Harold. "Knickers and bras."

"All right, then," said Horace. "You know about them, so you take care of them, Harold."

"Legit?" asked Harold.

"How can you without money?" said Horace. "You just do it and don't get caught. Hubert—"

"Okay. I know where there's some champagne. Got a friend who's a docker. Always unloading the stuff. How many dozen?"

Horace thought, then said, "Be about a hundred and twenty people here. Half a bottle each. How many dozen is that?"

"Don't know," said Hubert. "Make it a bottle each, that's easier. Ten dozen. What about the cake?"

"Me," said Horace. "I'll have a look round. Milky Waye will let us have the rest on credit." Milky Waye was the Club Secretary.

And that was that—each Head slowly and deliberately set to his job. But let it be said that years of experience had given them a certain facility and assurance in this kind of thing. So long as nothing unexpected turned up, they were

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reasonably competent. It was the unexpected that always threw the Heads.

Hubert—the champagne—had the easiest job. The docker he knew had a boy of fifteen who was keen on the ring and Hubert promised twenty free lessons in the manly art in return for some cooperation, and the docker agreed.

"Ten dozen it is, Hubert. Vintage or nonvintage?"

"Just champagne," said Hubert. "The stuff that fizzes. For a wedding."

After that all Hubert did was to turn up at the docks when his friend was off-loading, take the wink when the lorry driver went off to the canteen, and then drive the vehicle to the back door of the Minerva Club, unload, and then abandon the lorry in the Edgware Road. Easy.

Harold's job was a little more complicated. First of all, he had to get the right size dress. Marion obliged with her measurements and he paid a preliminary visit to one of the big stores and looked over the dresses, getting the girl to show him the right size. He picked one out and made a note of its position on the rack. He did nothing about inspecting underwear or sheets, being a shy sort of man.

The next day at about four o'clock he turned up at the store in his old clothes, carrying a plumber's bag, and went to the Men's Room. It was the oldest trick in the world. Nobody questions a plumber in a big store. Somebody had sent for him to check the bowls, he said, and in he went, smoked a cigarette with the attendant, then disappeared into a cubicle and rattled his tools for a while.

The attendant poked his head in later to say that he was going off for his tea, and Harold said that he'd be gone by the time the attendant got back, but that it was a big job and he would return tomorrow. When the attendant came back, the cubicle door was locked and an *OUT OF ORDER* notice hung from the handle. Inside was Harold.

He stayed inside until the store locked up, and then, with darkness, he came out. He took the dress, made a random selection of sheets and underwear, bundled the whole lot up, and dropped it out of a back window to Horace who was waiting below with a lorry. Then Harold came down on a rope which he had carried in his plumber's bag. Easy.

But it wasn't so easy for Horace. He had to get a wedding cake.

He scouted around for a few days examining the windows of high-class confectioners. In the end he found three, none of them too far from the Minerva Club; they all had cakes in their windows, beautiful three- and four-tiered jobs, iced, gleaming, with little

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wedding bells, cupids, the works.

He didn't know which to settle on until he noticed that one shop was called Marko and Son, and that reminded him that years ago Sam Marko, long dead—son, Simon, now in charge—had once been a black marketeer during the war and had applied for membership of the Minerva Club. But he'd only got an eighteen months' prison sentence behind him and had been turned down. From that moment Sam Marko had gone straight, built up a good business, and died a worthy citizen, his only regret that he had never been a Club member—this because the poker game at the Minerva was the best in town and Sam was crazy about poker. For old times' sake, he decided to take the Marko cake.

Horace was glad that he had chosen the Marko shop because it was the nearest to the Club. He broke into the back premises on a non-baking night, lifted the cake very gently from the window, draped a sheet over it, and walked out and down the street, breathing hard, but his hands steady. Like every other member of the Club he knew exactly what time the policemen in the neighborhood walked their beats and of course he had timed it beautifully. So, except for the small matter of the bride's brothers stealing top hats and morning clothes, all the preparations for the wedding were complete.

It was a beautiful wedding. Horace gave the bride away, and Marion, he thought, looked far too good for Tony; and Tony, his tanned face smiling with joy, led her down the aisle. Off they went to the reception at the Club.

The Annex was crowded with club members and guests, and the champagne went round and round until it began to look as though a bottle a head was not going to be enough.

Then came the cutting-of-the-cake ceremony and Tony, one lean brown hand over Marion's, helped her to make the first cut. But as they both pressed down on the knife, the surface of the cake resisted their efforts. Tony, his Latin temperament stirring at this obstacle, held Marion's hand more firmly—but still the cake would not give.

"Maybe," said Horace, "it is a little stale from being in that window."

"Maybe," said Hubert.

"Or the knife is blunt," said Harold.

But at this moment Tony gave the lower tier of the cake a rap with the handle of the knife. In the silence of the room, watched by a hundred and twenty pairs of eyes, the cake echoed hollowly.

Suddenly Tony turned from Marion and faced the three brothers. As a murmur spread through the crowd, he held up his hand for silence. Then in a calm, even voice,

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full of control, but vibrant with growing passion, he addressed the three brothers.

"I have something of major importance to say," said Tony. "I address myself to my three brothers-in-law and crave the indulgence of the guests here for intruding a purely family matter into this happy atmosphere. For two years I have honestly, passionately, and worthily wooed Marion. And for two years I have born with complacency and, I trust, dignity, the insults and the moronic practical jokes of my brothers-in-law, all designed to destroy the true love between Marion and myself. This—" his hand gestured toward the cake, "—is their last and final insult. Instead of a proper wedding cake, they have presented us with a plaster of Paris model. But let no one think that this final humiliation will, like the others, go unpunished . . ."

"What," said Horace, "is he talking about?"

"Your cake, I think," said Hubert.

"It ain't real," said Harold. "Just a phony window display."

"Until now," Tony went on, "I have stayed my hand, since it would not have been becoming for a suitor to assault—no matter what the provocation—the brothers of his fiancée, But now, since I am a member of the family, there can be no such prohibition. Family members are entitled to fight among themselves. Harold, I will take you first."

Tony stepped toward the three brothers. For a moment Harold's eyes were dull with puzzlement. Then a joyful light flashed in them.

"You mean, you want to mix it, Tony?" he asked happily.

"I do," said Tony.

And he did, and it was a revelation to the other two brothers. Harold squared up, a space was made around them, and then Tony dove in. It was like lightning hitting a rotten elm. Before Harold knew what had hit him he was on the floor, taking little more interest in the immediate proceedings.

"Nice footwork," said Horace appreciatively.

"But he leaves himself wide open," said Hubert. "My turn, I believe, Tony?"

"Yours," said Tony.

This time it took a little longer—say, twenty seconds—and Hubert joined Harold on the floor. A cheer rose from the assembled guests. This, as Solly Badrubal said afterward, was a wedding to remember.

Looking down at his two brothers, Horace shook his head.

"I'd never have believed it." He grinned with delight. "You know how to handle yourself. Why, it's a treat to see. But they're both a bit rusty. Now then, see what you can do against the head of the Heads."

And Tony showed him. It took five minutes and Horace put all he knew of his old craft into it, and

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the furniture and furnishings of the Annex suffered badly. But Tony was like a flicker of lightning and, finally, it was Tony going in and out, bang, bang, and a beauty of an uppercut that laid Horace to rest with his brothers.

As they lay on the floor, Tony turned, lifted the cake, and threw it at their feet. The plaster of Paris model smashed into a thousand pieces, and the guests raised their glasses in a spontaneous toast, shouting with joy.

Tony turned to Marion, embraced her, and said, "I am sorry, my love. I should have been more restrained."

"Why?" said Marion, and her eyes shone with pride and devotion.

At this moment, as the three Head brothers began to sit up, Milky Waye came storming into the Annex. He took one look around, and magisterial in his capacity as Secretary of the Club, addressed Tony and the three Heads.

"Gentlemen, may I draw your attention to Rule 13b of the Minerva Club bylaws? *Any members engaging in unseemly conduct, brawling, fighting, or such activities calculated to disturb the peace of other members and the good name of the Club are automatically, without trial or right of appeal, deprived of membership.* Gentlemen, you are no longer members of this Club."

Now, this was a thunderbolt—to be expelled from the Minerva Club was to be sent into the wilderness and never recalled. It could ruin the whole of one's professional life. The Head brothers gaped at Milky Waye, and Tony's face clouded as tragedy struck twice on his wedding day.

"Give over," said Horace. "It was just a family affair."

"No justification—you all know the rule," said Milky.

"Wait a minute, Milky," said Solly Badrubal. He had come over to the Head brothers and was standing, glass of champagne in hand, amid the wreckage of the cake. "There's another rule. Rule 25c, which reads: *None of the aforesaid rules of the Minerva Club shall be effective if, in the opinion of the Secretary and one other member of the Club, any offense, although proved, can also be shown to have materially benefited the Club.*" He turned to Horace. "Where did you get this cake?"

"Sam—I mean, Simon—Marko's place," said Horace. "If I'd known—"

"Shut up," said Solly. He bent down and picked up something from the wreckage. "Just as I thought," he said, turning to Milky. "Remember old Sam Marko? Always wanted to be a member. Not a bad chap. Mad on poker. But he didn't have enough prison time to qualify. Often a guest here, round about the days when our statue of Minerva was stolen. Well, here it is."

He handed over a small gold

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statue of the Goddess Minerva which had been hidden in the plaster of the lower tier of the cake.

"Must have pinched it in anger, then didn't know what to do with it," said Solly. "So he hid it in his display cake and died without telling a soul. You can't say, Milky, that these gentlemen haven't materially benefited the Club. We've got our Minerva mascot back, haven't we?"

For a moment Milky hesitated. Then he said solemnly, "The point is well taken. Gentlemen, you are herewith reinstated."

And not only reinstated, but united, for from that moment the three Heads—now well aware of the true fighting calibre of their brother-in-law—were 100% behind Marion's husband.

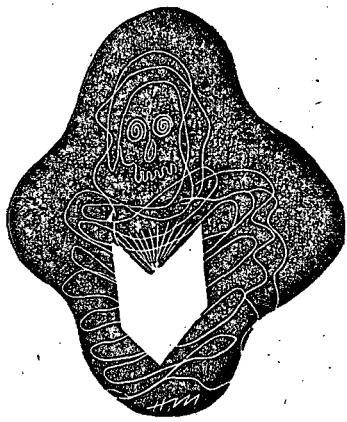
"Just shows," said Horace, rubbing his jaw, "we was hasty about him."

"Never seen such footwork," said Hubert, tenderly fingering a swollen eye.

"Really packs a punch," said Harold, testing a loose tooth.

The three of them raised their glasses to Tony.

Even for the Minerva Club it was "a wedding to remember" . . .



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THE PERIL OF BEING AN EDITOR

by LEE FOSTER

ELAINE TOOK HERBERT'S HAT AND coat and hung them in the guest closet.

"I've got a sort of surprise for you," she said.

The surprise was her husband George sprawled dead in the kitchen, his face stiff with dried blood from a deep gash in his head.

"I hit him with my heavy iron skillet," said Elaine. "The one I use for *coq au vin*."

Herbert turned white, then greenish white, and seemed to sway.

"For God's sake, don't collapse," said Elaine. "If you collapse I'll go to pieces too."

Herbert steadied himself against the refrigerator.

"What—" He croaked, then cleared his throat. "What happened?"

"I asked George for a divorce," said Elaine, "and he did what he always does when I talk to him. He edited my remarks. So I hit him with this."

She picked up the blood-smeared skillet and offered it to Herbert, who recoiled. So she stood there with it in her hand and the weight of it slowly forced her arm down.

"Have you called the police?" Herbert asked, finally getting hold of himself.

"No. I called you instead."

"Why?"

"That's a fine question. Because you're my lawyer and my lover, that's why."

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"In ten minutes I'll call the police," said Herbert. "So tell me exactly what happened. Everything."

"I asked George for a divorce."

"When? Where?"

"About seven o'clock. Here in the kitchen. I was getting dinner ready. He came in to get ice to mix some martinis."

"All right. Tell me everything you said and did and everything George said and did. Try to tell it to me in the exact words you both used."

Elaine took a deep breath and began. "I said, 'George, I want a divorce.' George said, 'Why? Because of Herbert?' I said, 'Herbert is your phobia, isn't he? You feel compelled to talk about him because you don't want to admit your own faults.' Then George said, 'You don't mean phobia. You mean obsession. Phobia is a persistent fear. Obsession is an inescapable preoccupation, which is what you really mean.' "

Elaine's beautiful face became ferocious. Herbert sensed she was no longer talking to him but reliving a conversation with the man on the kitchen floor.

"Damn you, George," cried Elaine, "You're always correcting me! How many times have I told you to stop it—but you won't. That's why I want a divorce."

Elaine now mimicked George: "That's a great reason for a divorce. Did Herbert the legal genius tell you it would hold up in court?"

"Never mind about Herbert," Elaine said furiously. "Let's talk about you. You're infantile and insecure. You even correct me in front of people so they can imply you're smarter than I am because you're a big editor and I only write little books for little children."

"Not imply." Elaine again mimicked George. "Infer. People infer that I'm smarter than you are from what my corrections imply. Get it?"

"You're trying to be so smart and smug and superior," Elaine said, hissing each "s." "But you're a stupid man with a little knowledge. And a little knowledge can be dangerous."

"Not knowledge," said George. "Learning. A little learning. Alexander Pope."

Elaine's hand tightened convulsively on the skillet.

"Stop correcting me," she screamed. "Say something that means something! I'm telling you that I hate you, that I love another man, that my loathing for you drove me into his arms, that the man I love is your best friend. Now *say* something!"

"All right," said George with a savage smile. "I'll say something, you hack writer of little bunny books. You just used three clichés in a single sentence: I love another man . . . my loathing for you drove me into his arms . . . the man I love is your best friend."

An intense rage welled up in

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Elaine—so powerful that it made her dizzy. The room swam.

"George, George," she moaned in an ecstasy of hate. "I can't stand it any more. You're making me nauseous."

"What a word to use," sneered George. "Nauseous. And you not only use it, you misuse it. I don't make you nauseous. I nauseate you. There's a diff—"

With all her might Elaine smashed the skillet against George's head. Only this time it swung through empty air—for George was already dead at her feet.

"My God," said Herbert. "My God."

He shook Elaine and kept shaking her until her mind snapped back to the here and now.

"Help me, Herbert," she cried suddenly and piteously. "That's the way it happened. You love me and you're a lawyer. Tell them it was temporary insanity from being incessantly corrected. Any jury would find me innocent."

"Not guilty, you mean," said Herbert. "You can't plead innocent because you might be required to prove it and under our system of law no one has to prove his innocence. A person is presumed innocent until—"

An incredulous horror took possession of Elaine and again, with all her might, she swung the skillet.

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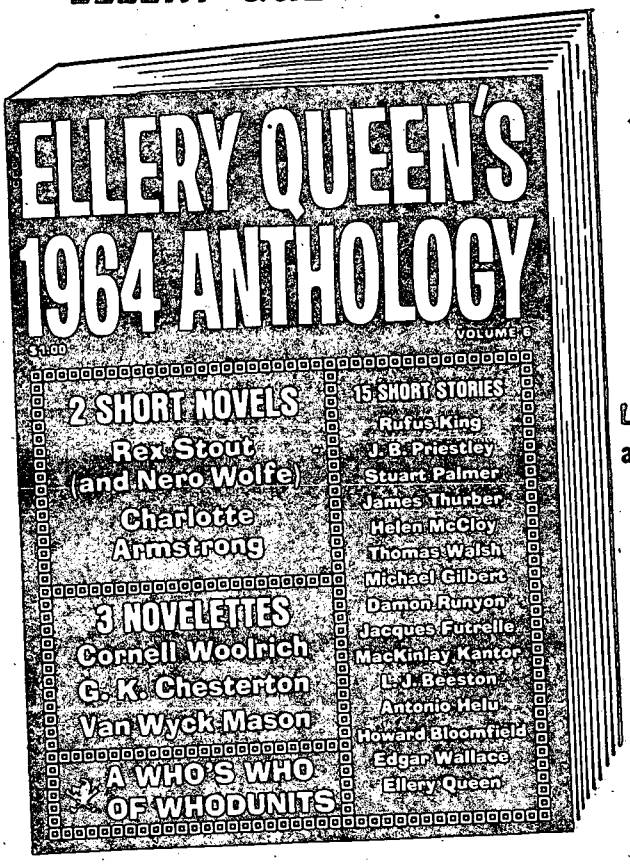

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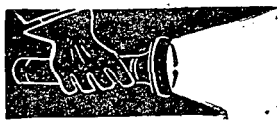

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recommended by ANTHONY BOUCHER

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★★★★ **DEAD CALM, *by Charles Williams*** (Viking, $3.50)

Man's battle against the sea (stranded in mid-Pacific) and his even more dangerous fellow man; splendid exercise in absolute suspense.

★★★★ **DEAD WATER, *by Ngaio Marsh*** (Little, Brown, $3.95)

"Miraculous" cure in Cornwall leads to creation of a cut-rate Lourdes — and murder suavely solved by Superintendent Roderick Alleyn.

★★★ **THE NEON HAYSTACK, *by James Michael Ullman*** (Simon & Schuster, $3.50)

Tense and effective tale of quest and retribution, by author of EQMM's Bennett-James series. Winner of Inner Sanctum prize contest.

★★★ **THE BODY CAME BACK, *by Brett Halliday*** (Torquil-Dodd, Mead, $3.50)

Mike Shayne's 47th case is a happy blend of macabre farce and skillful fair-play deception.

Readers should know that there are organizations which honor detectives other than Sherlock Holmes. For The James Bond Society, write to Marvin Leibowitz, New Hyde Park, N. Y. For The Miss Silver Club, address Teresa S. FitzPatrick, The Almy Associates, Coggeshall Ave., Newport, R. I. And now who will volunteer as corresponding secretary for The Ellery Queen Esthetic Quorum?

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MURDER IN THE ANTIQUE CAR MUSEUM

by KELLEY ROOS

(*Continued from page 90*)

Nancy stood immobilized, as frozen as the fifth figure itself. Her eyes were on its back, and again she told herself that she was mistaken, that it was only a mannequin posed beside the car.

Her imagination, twisted by the weird silence of the great gloomy barn, was betraying her into panic. The fifth figure was not a human being. She was being driven into hysteria by a bundle of wood and wax. Before she realized what she was doing, Nancy had raised her arm and hurled the spring in her hand at the crouching figure.

The piece of metal struck the figure a glancing blow, and it swayed and froze again. And she still didn't know.

She shook the panic out of her mind. It wasn't necessary for her to pass the group of mannequins to get out of the barn. There was another door, a side door. She took a step backward, then another.

The fifth figure began to rise and turn toward her.

With a cry she swung around, running. Her hand hit the side of a car, and the flashlight was torn out of it by the impact. She groped wildly through inky darkness and stumbled against a wall.

Behind her she could hear a frantic rush of movement, not coming toward her, but driving toward the side door of the barn. She plunged along the wall, knowing that she must be the first to reach the door.

She smashed into the side of a car and fell to her knees. She pulled herself to her feet and moved forward again. Her hand found the smooth wood of the door.

She opened it and slipped through, jerking it closed behind her. The handle was caught on the inside, the door held open. She could hear a gasping for breath that was not her own.

Letting go of the door, she hurled herself down the steps. Her feet hit the lawn and she ran for the shelter of the woods that lay beyond it. Leaves and branches slapped at her face, the underbrush tore at her legs. Abruptly she stumbled onto a path. She raced along it for a moment, then swerved back into the brush.

She could hear a wild thrashing that was coming closer to her. Then the thrashing stopped and there were quick footsteps on the path. Holding her breath, she crouched down to the ground, pressing herself deep into the thick weeds.

The footsteps moved past her, thudding on the hard dirt. She crawled out onto the path, moving cautiously back toward the barn.

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Then she was leaving the barn behind her and racing for the house, which was silhouetted now against a graying sky. A light shone from a kitchen window and she rushed toward it. A startled maid turned away from the stove as Nancy burst through the kitchen door.

"Miss Carter! What is it?"

"Joel! I've got to see Joel!"

"Nobody's up yet but me, Miss Carter."

Nancy ran past her, into the hall and up the stairway. She started down the corridor toward Joel's room. A door beside her opened and Amy, still dressed in the white jacket and slacks, stepped into her path.

"Nancy!"

"I've got to see Joel. I've got to talk to him."

She tried to brush past Amy, but the tall girl blocked her way. She said, "You can't see him now, Nancy; he's sleeping."

With a sudden, quick movement Nancy slipped past her, ran to Joel's door, knocked loudly on it.

"Joel," she called, "it's Nancy."

Behind her, Amy's voice was sharp and cold. "You're being thoughtless."

Nancy turned the knob, thrust open the door. The light from the corridor fell across a neatly made bed, an empty room. She turned slowly back to face Amy.

"Where is he?" she said. "Where has he gone?"

"I don't know. I thought—"

"You do know. You tried to keep me from finding out that he wasn't here. Amy, tell me where he is."

For a moment the tall girl wavered. She said, "Nancy, I—" She stopped, and her lips closed in a tight, hard line. She said, "I've told you I don't know." She turned away from Nancy and started back toward her room. At the doorway she stopped. "Nancy," she said, "I think you ought to try to get some rest. Randy Fuller's coming early this morning to take you home."

Amy closed her door after her, and Nancy heard the click of a lock. She walked slowly down the hall to her own room . . .

It was nine thirty and Nancy still stood before her bedroom window, watching the driveway below. A few minutes before she had seen Ward McLane drive up the hill in his car and enter the house. Now another car was swinging in beside McLane's. She couldn't see the driver clearly and for a moment she thought it was Joel. But it was Randy Fuller who jumped out of the car and ran up the front steps.

She turned away from the window and started down the stairs. She was going to tell Randy Fuller that he wouldn't be taking her home after all, that she wasn't leaving this house until Joel had been cleared of the charge of murder.

She found Randy alone in the living room. He glanced at her and nodded, but he didn't speak. His

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eyes moved back to the half-opened door of the study through which they could hear the soft, plaintive voice of Ward McLane.

"I've been so afraid something like this might happen," he was saying. "Amy, you know Sharon, how unreasonable she is. I almost knew that she'd leave me after this."

"She'll come back, Ward," Amy said. Her voice was consoling. "After a while she'll realize—"

"I'm not sure. She's fed up with me, Amy, and I don't blame her. I've made so many mistakes during our marriage. And now the land . . . she'd counted so much on that money. She begged me to sell it long ago, but I kept holding out for more."

"You wanted it for her sake, Ward. She knows that."

"Yes, she must know. And if Harvey had lived, I would have got my price. I would have proved to her that for once in my life I'd been right. But there's no good talking about it now. Amy, if she gets in touch with you, you'll let me know at once? I've got to see her again."

The heavy knocker bounced a noisy summons on the front door and Randy Fuller rose quickly to his feet.

"I'll get it," he said.

Nancy followed him to the hallway arch. He opened the door for Wexford's Chief of Police and a uniformed State Trooper.

Kroll said, "Amy's expecting us. I talked to her on the phone a little while ago. This is Lieutenant Foley."

The two policemen walked past Nancy into the living room. Amy and Ward McLane had come out of the study and stood waiting for Kroll and Foley.

Kroll said, "Joel back yet, Amy?"

She shook her head. "No, not yet."

"He's been gone quite a while."

"Not so long." She shot one quick glance at Nancy, then her eyes went back to the policeman and her voice was calm and casual. "He just went for a walk after breakfast, as I told you. He's been gone only a little more than an hour."

"We've been looking for him longer than that," the State Trooper said brusquely. He nodded at Nancy. "Is this Miss Carter?"

"Yes. I'm Nancy Carter."

"You got any ideas about your car?"

"My car? The Scat?"

"That's right."

Amy said quickly, "She doesn't know about it yet, Lieutenant. She just came down. I haven't had a chance to tell her."

She turned to Nancy. "Your car's gone, Nancy. This morning when Charley Ball went to tow it out of the ditch, it wasn't there."

"You mean he couldn't find it?"

Foley said, "No, that's not what she means. The mechanic found your overnight bag; it had been thrown in the ditch along with your

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duster and your hat. And he found where your car had been, all right. But the car itself had been stolen."

"But why?" Nancy said. "Why would anyone take it?"

"It's worth a lot of money, isn't it?"

"Yes, I suppose so. It's quite old, you know, and very rare. So few of them were made that they're valuable."

"How valuable?" Foley asked.

"I don't know exactly. My father paid almost two thousand for his. But it had to be completely restored, and that cost a lot. I couldn't guess how much it's worth now."

"Wait a minute," Kroll said. He stepped toward Ward McLane. "Leo Frayne sold his Scat after he'd restored it. How much did he get for it, Ward?"

"Leo Frayne?" the Trooper asked.

"My cousin," Ward said. "Yes, he sold his about ten years ago to a collector in Ohio . . . Akron. He wrote me about the price. It was more than five thousand."

Foley whistled softly. "Five thousand. That's enough money for someone to risk—"

"But it isn't," Ward said. "There's no way of cashing in on it. A Scat is such an oddity that it couldn't be sold—it would be recognized immediately. I can't believe that the car was stolen."

Randy Fuller rose from a window seat. "Then why was it taken? Where is it?"

"Maybe," Foley said, "Joel could tell us that."

Amy's face went white. "You don't mean—you can't be thinking that Joel—"

"Amy," Kroll said, "where is Joel?"

"I've told you. He went for a walk."

"It's a long walk, Amy."

"Too long," Foley said. "I don't like it. Maybe he's walked right out of the state."

"He hasn't run away," Amy said. "I promise you he'll come back!"

"We won't take any chances," Foley said. "I'm going to put his description on the wire. If he has wandered away, he'll be picked up. If you'll tell me where the phone is, I'll—"

"Don't bother," said a voice from the archway.

Joel walked into the room. He was disheveled and pale, weary to the dropping point. He moved to the long oak table, leaned against it, facing the two policemen.

Kroll said, "Where have you been, Joel?"

Amy said, "I've told them, I—"

"Let him tell us, Amy."

Joel was looking at Amy. He said, "I'm going to tell them, Amy. I went to see Larry."

Amy stepped toward him beseechingly, but Kroll's voice stopped her. "Who's Larry, Joel?"

"A friend of mine, Larry Owen. He lives in New London. I've just been up there to see him."

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He took a deep breath and spoke rapidly. "Last year when I needed a new press and linotype machine for my printing business, Larry lent me the money. A month ago Larry himself got into a financial jam. He has to have the money back."

"And you thought it was necessary to see this Owen about your loan last night? You'll have to think of something better than that, Joel." Kroll's voice was sarcastic.

"It was about the note for the loan, wasn't it, Joel?" Amy said swiftly. She turned to Kroll. "Joel was protecting me. I insisted on co-signing the note for the money. And now I suppose Joel thought it would be better if Owen didn't volunteer anything about my responsibility for the money."

"We'll check on those signatures later," Kroll said. "Tell me, Joel, what if you couldn't pay the loan back—what would that mean?"

"Everything," Joel said grimly. "The works. I'd lose the business."

"You tried to get the money from Harvey, of course."

"Yes. He didn't think I was any better risk than the banks around here do."

"But now that he's dead," Foley cut in, "you've got all the money you need."

"That's right," Joel said quietly.

"And yesterday afternoon you made one last try to get the money from him. When he refused again you lost your temper."

"No!" Amy cried. "That wasn't Joel in the barn with Harvey!"

"Amy," Joel said, "don't—"

"I've got to, Joel! Can't you see that they're convinced you're guilty?" She turned to the old policeman: "Mr. Kroll, I was the one fighting with Harvey, asking him for money."

"She was doing it for me," Joel said. "She was trying to get it for me."

"But don't you understand?" Amy pleaded. "Joel wasn't in the barn! The murderer came in after I left."

"You saw him, Amy?" Kroll said. "You saw that it wasn't Joel?"

"No," Amy said, "I didn't see anyone, I—"

Foley interrupted her impatiently. "Joel needed money, and now, because his uncle is dead, he's got it. I think he'd better call his lawyer, and then he's coming with me."

Nancy stepped in front of the state trooper. "I've got to see Joel alone first, just for a minute."

"Why?" Foley asked flatly.

"There's something I must tell him."

"You can tell us, too, Miss Carter."

"No—I—"

Joel said, "Go ahead, Nancy; it's all right. What is it?"

"It's about something I found. I wanted to tell you first, Joel. I don't know what it means and I—I was afraid it might be one more thing against you."

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"What did you find, Miss Carter?" Kroll asked, his voice kind.

"The old spring leaf that Charley said was stolen. It was put in a mannequin's hand—the one that's fixing a tire—so that it looked like a tire iron that belonged there. I can't see why it's important—it's just part of a spring from a Scat—but it must be. That's why the fuse was blown last night—to hide the spring leaf, not to murder me. And when I found it, there was someone in the barn, watching me. Someone who came after me, tried to get me. This time I think whoever it was did mean to kill me."

"Nancy," Joel said, "it was a spring leaf from a Scat? You're sure?"

"Positive."

"Not one from your own car? You're sure of that?"

"Yes. Ours are all shined up. This one is rusty from being in the mud. It was the one the boys found by the lake."

"We can figure this out later," Foley said. He walked to Joel, put his hand on his arm. "Right now let's get moving."

"Wait," Joel said. "Give me a minute, just a minute!"

He circled the room and stopped before the window seat where Ward McLane and Randy Fuller sat. Abruptly, he said, "Ward, why wouldn't you sell your land to Harvey?"

Ward looked at him in surprise. "But I did agree to sell it, you know that. If Harvey hadn't been killed—"

"Months ago," Joel said, "Harvey offered you ten thousand for it—a fantastic price. Why didn't you take it?"

"I thought he wanted it enough to pay more. And I was right. He agreed to buy at eighteen."

"There might have been another reason for your holding out, Ward."

"Another reason? I don't understand."

"You knew what Harvey planned to do with the land, didn't you?"

"Of course, everyone knew. He was going to restore the section of old turnpike."

"And that meant draining the lake."

"Naturally," Ward said.

"I don't think you wanted that lake drained."

"Why not?" He looked up at Joel and his eyes were bewildered. "What difference could that make to me?"

"This," Joel said. "That spring leaf Nancy identified as belonging to a Scat came out of the lake. You know how few of those cars were ever made, how rare they were. Leo had one. What happened to his Scat, Ward?"

"We were just talking about it, Joel, before you came. He sold it to some man out in Akron; you remember that, don't you? He drove it out there to him."

"That's what you've been saying all these years. It's strange that

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none of us ever heard from Leo after that."

"I heard from him. He wrote me after he sold his car."

"That's what you've told us."

"But it's true! Why should I lie?"

"Ward, is Leo dead? Is that why you wouldn't sell the land? Because you knew what would be found at the bottom of the lake when it was drained?"

The portly little man's eyes blinked incredulously at Joel. "Do you know what you're saying? No, you can't! Joel, pull yourself together!"

"I think that Leo and his car are at the bottom of that lake, and that's why you couldn't sell the land. You asked eighteen thousand for it, but you never dreamed that Harvey was so fanatical about his hobby he'd pay that much. But when he finally agreed, then you had to sell. And you planned to murder Harvey after you got your money—but before he drained the lake."

"Joel, this is idiotic! Harvey was murdered *before* I got the money! His death cheated me of eighteen thousand dollars! Why would I have—?

"You had to, Ward. Because Nancy arrived yesterday in a Scat and you saw her drive up the hill. You knew that Harvey would show her the spring leaf, and she would identify it for him. Or if that didn't happen right away, Harvey would see the springs on her Scat when he pored over it as he did over every old car. And then he would realize, just as I have, what happened to Leo Frayne. That's why you drove Nancy into the ditch. You had to delay her getting to Harvey. You had to get to him first."

"Joel, you're accusing me of murder!"

"Yes, you murdered Harvey. But you couldn't find the spring leaf because Charley hadn't put it back in the wall case. And you didn't have time to hunt for it. Nancy had come into the barn, and you had to get away. Then later, while we were waiting for the police, you saw it and you knew you had to get rid of it. You were afraid to just take it . . . the police might search us or someone might notice that you were carrying a strip of metal in your duster pocket. So you hid it temporarily in the mannequin's hand, and went back last night to get it."

"Joel, you're just guessing—"

"No, it all makes sense. And Nancy's car . . . you had to get rid of it, too, before Charley or someone saw the springs on it and realized that they were the same as the one found by the lake. Where is Nancy's car, Ward? Is it at the bottom of the lake with Leo's?"

"This is all crazy! You've no proof."

"Ward, the lake is going to be drained. If the police won't have it done, I will."

Slowly Ward McLane sank down on the window seat. Randy Fuller got up, moved away from him. No

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one spoke; there was a wall of silence around him. He looked up at last, his eyes glazed. His voice was a whisper.

"I didn't mean to kill Leo, it was an accident . . . a quarrel over Sharon. But I was afraid that no one . . . that they wouldn't believe me. I chained him to the Scat before I—I pushed it in the lake. That's when the spring must have broken. I thought I was safe forever. How could I know that Harvey would want to buy the land, drain the lake? He forced me to kill him!"

His voice rose with a horrible shrillness as he directed it toward Nancy. "And you . . . you forced me to try to kill you! If you'd stayed out of it . . . I was going to get rid of the Scat when I saw the police leave the barn. I thought I could get the spring leaf out of it then, and I would have . . . except for you, nobody would ever have known."

He took a step toward Nancy, but the State Trooper was moving in on him. He rushed futilely at the policeman, screaming.

Nancy turned away. She felt Joel's arm around her, drawing her quickly from the room . . .

It was a new car, modern as next year, that rolled through the afternoon sun, speeding away from Wexford. Nancy swung sideways in her seat to face Joel behind the wheel.

"Joel," Nancy said.

"Yes?"

"I'll never forgive myself for misjudging Amy. Murder twists you, makes you do strange things. Amy was always trying to help you. She's wonderful, Joel."

"Sure, she is. My kids will be lucky . . . having Amy for an aunt."

"An aunt?"

"Well, technically, a step-aunt-once-removed."

"Oh," Nancy said. "I thought when you stopped seeing me that—that there was someone else. And when I met Amy, I was sure."

Joel smiled. "I never stopped seeing you, Nancy. I got so involved with the business, with trying to pay that loan back. I was in trouble, Nancy."

"You should have told me. Maybe I could have helped."

"From now on you'll hear all my troubles."

"Will I, Joel?"

"Well, will you?"

"Yes," Nancy said. "It'll be a pleasure."

The car slowed down for a small town's traffic. It stopped at a red light at the main intersection. A policeman came around to Nancy's side of the car. He was grinning.

"Say, miss, what happened to that old car you drove through here yesterday?"

"It's at the bottom of a lake," Nancy said.

The policeman nodded in understanding. "Good place for it," he said.

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A strange story—as strange a story as we have published in EQMM in a long time—yet also a tale full of meanings and implications . . .

About the author: all we know is that "Clifton Hill" is a pseudonym—and not another detail. All our inquiries about the author's age, background, vocation, avocations—all our questions remained unanswered. One remark made by the author in the letter attached to the original manuscript led us to believe that this may be the author's second appearance in print — and if this inference is correct, we regret that this story is so close, and yet so far, from a "first." It would have been a curiously memorable "first story" . . .

THE IMAGE OF MY FATHER'S FACE

by CLIFTON HILL

Monday, August 23

I recently came across a copy of a letter written by a pious sage of medieval Spain—a letter written to his son in a distant land. Following a series of maxims and admonitions, the letter concluded with the following reminder: "And remember, my son, to keep ever before you the image of my face."

I felt, on reading this, a twinge of admiration for the psychological acuteness of the old man. For how far could the poor son venture—in the way of youthful folly, that is—with the image of his father's face pre-empting his imagination? Any ardent and adventurous impulses would surely be dampened at their birth, and he would be treading the path of proper action all his days—indeed, even after his father's death. Thus it is that centuries before Pavlov we find the laws of blessed conditioning shaping the behavior of the young.

Now this letter has a peculiar relevance to my own condition, for I too am haunted by a paternal image, and to an even more ominous degree. Presumably our youth of medieval times could blandly ignore his father's advice—an option never granted to me. For, as a result of years of rigorous conditioning, I am compelled—yes, compelled—to respond like a salivating dog to the inner image of my own father's face. The features of that bald and yellowed visage come to me unbidden, and at the most inopportune times. And my reaction? Always the same: anxiety approaching panic; a shrinking of the spirit.

Unlike the medieval parallel, my father was neither a sage nor a pious man. He was, rather, a machine whose parts meshed badly, mind-

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lessly churning, the process punctuated frequently by horrendous bursts of scalding steam, generally directed at me. Since the dynamics of my father's mechanism were internally regulated, my own variable behavior seemed to bear little relationship to its outbursts. That is, I never knew precisely when I had committed a misdemeanor, for my father's fury would descend on me strictly in obedience to some inner law of his own discordant nature.

My mother, though she harbored an instinct for compassion which she gratified secretly by feeding stray cats, could only comfort me with a distracted and cautious hand, since she lived in terror of my father's iron wrath.

But that's all past now—both my parents are gone. Nor do I wish to suggest that they were responsible for the individual I have become. No, in the last analysis, we are the agents of our own destiny, striving to realize our unique selfhood in our own individual fashion. Of course, there remains this legacy from my father, this gift of panic that handicaps me in my pursuit of success or friends or love.

Yes, it is remarkable how vividly his face appears to my inner view just at those moments when I am about to make a move in the direction of growth or autonomy: to stand up for my rights, for instance, or to approach a woman. At such times my father is very much with me—he might be standing at the door—and I am suffused with a numbing dread, a remnant of the old terror that renders me impotent of body and spirit, crippled, as it were, and despairing.

For people like myself, who tend to experience extreme anxiety in any number of situations, activity is limited to relatively few avenues of safety. Thus it is that I find myself at Harlow, an isolated, placid little college, sending out fleeting sparks of intellect from the mossy English hills.

Harlow is such a small place that I am the only member of the Psychology Department, free to function without fear of challenge, within the security of my own anxiety-bound horizon. To the same handicap I attribute my major field of effort—the study of fear in rats.

Yes, it is fear and anxiety that I choose to investigate in my hapless subjects. I create these states in my rats under carefully controlled experimental conditions. And once I have induced an experimental neurosis in one of my beady-eyed charges, why, sometimes I am able to effect a cure, to restore the animal to health and freedom.

Now it should be apparent that every scientist begins his plunge into objectivity from subjective need—I am not unique in this. But in my case, it must be admitted, the relationship between personal concerns and professional interests is direct and self-evident. At least I recognize it to be—I don't resort to

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mechanisms of self-deception and denial. Sometimes, indeed, it seems to me that I am too painfully honest with myself.

My students appear to think well of me. My relations with colleagues are relaxed, superficial, just as I would wish them to be. But sometimes—no, often—frustration grips me like a giant claw, and the solemn laws of academic life, of human existence, loom before me like some monstrous, pointless practical joke; and Death, my frequent, urgent companion, takes my hand in his and whispers, "Perhaps one heartbeat more."

Well, I wonder what this mood of mine is all about. Very likely the result of completing my latest piece of research. I put the finishing touches on it only this morning and shipped it off to the *Journal of Experimental Psychopathology*. Helen, my secretary, placed the final typescript on my desk only an hour ago. I sat here and gazed fondly at its crisp perfection—the shiny blackness of the letters forged from the electric typewriter, and the pure white paper, solid and reassuring in the hand.

Holding the pages delicately by the edges, just barely supported by the pressure of my freshly washed fingers, I allowed them to drift one on top of the other while my eyes caressed the flawless arrangement of headings and footnotes and bibliography, all in strict accordance with the *Journal's* requirements.

How the clean and crystalline form of a thing can bewitch us, beclouding our critical faculties! So that it wasn't until I'd dropped the manuscript into an envelope and sealed it and returned it to Helen, that I thought: "But it's a travesty, this research, a farce. What does it have to do with life, this hot-footing of rats on a wire grid? What kind of work might I not accomplish if I were a whole man?" And so on. That's usually the way it goes when I complete a piece of research: a little elation, and a little depression.

But now Helen has come into my office with coffee and we will talk together. She will tell me about her mother-in-law and about her dreams —Helen seems to think I'm a clinical psychologist—and about how exciting it was when her husband "practically assaulted" her the other night in violation of her conscious desires.

Helen will sit opposite me, the border of her skirt underscoring one exposed knee, her large gray eyes watching my face in all earnestness, her somewhat bony, slender fingers handling the ritual objects of the coffee break on the naked table, sometimes brushing my own . . .

I do not believe it is with any malice, or even awareness, that she mocks me. Amid the stirring and chiming of the spoons and cups I will sit, as I do each day, circling her body with my eyes, a prisoner of my yearning, smothered in the prison of my self.

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But Adelaide is also in the office—on my desk, in fact—and her presence is soothing. Adelaide is a little caprice of mine, an experimental subject whom I have domesticated. I exposed the poor girl to so many shocks of electricity during my last study that I decided to adopt her and make it all up to her.

I should have known Adelaide would bear me no ill-will—rats rarely do. If you have raised them conscientiously, providing them with plenty of tender-loving-care, with adequate handling and petting from birth on, then no subsequent harmful stimulation will cause them to turn against you, or even to avoid your hand. I have at present in the vivarium some twenty subjects, all of whom were exposed to electric shock in my large, three-foot by four-foot experimental chamber, simultaneously and repeatedly. (See my study: *Group Interaction Effects of Simultaneous Negative Reinforcement.*) The floor of the chamber consists of a grid of metal bars. A touch of the switch and the bars hum with invisible pain—a mere tingle to the hand of a man (unless the current is increased), but agony for these delicate creatures.

As I say, these twenty animals have had their day on the fire, squealing and hopping about, pink noses twitching in terror, making desperate efforts to expose as little as possible of their tender flesh to the demon bars of the grid. And yet, if I so much as approach the cage in which these rats are housed, all twenty abused creatures clamber eagerly at the door, seeking—what? Not food or water, for their cage is amply stocked, but my presence, my hand to hold and stroke them.

I could have chosen any one of them to become my personal companion, but I selected Adelaide because of her particular grace and sensuality, and the somewhat mellower, richer ruby tones of her eyes. She romps freely about my office, eats from my hand, and scampers to me when I call her name.

All this may seem a bit eccentric. (It does?) But I am not the first experimental psychologist to assume guardianship of a rat.

But I see that Helen is waiting patiently while I write, and the coffee will be getting cold. My blood, on the other hand, begins now to quicken and warm as I sense her still, breathing presence behind me. My face is suffused with heat. But sooner or later I must turn . . .

Tuesday, August 24

The campus swims in hot, drowsy stillness. Since the summer session ended several weeks ago, few people are about. This morning I dictated the notes for my new course in Abnormal Psychology. Helen, in her pale yellow summer dress, shifting and settling her body in the chair, pencil in hand, poised, patient—Helen confounded my brain and stilled my speech, and I accomplished little.

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During the coffee break she opened to me those eyes of such frank and melting purity, so that seeing them, I trembled. But what those eyes convey I have no idea, not being a reader of eyes, not even of Adelaide's.

Today she told me she and her husband had not wanted a baby so soon after marriage, "but you know how it is when you're first married, you can't have enough of each other." I have developed quite a hatred for this young husband, whom I have never met. He seems to represent everything I lack—health, courage, fulfillment.

Helen, too, with her fleeting, sometimes poignant problems, her flurries of pride and hurt and anger, falls well within the center of that beautiful bell-shaped curve by which normality is defined and described. I wonder if she ever feels a pang of anxiety. But of course she must—in the nightmares she relates to me, from which she wakes in heart-thudding fright, her hand clutching her breast—warm, exquisite, untouchable . . .

Wednesday, August 25

I'm like a schoolboy, so atremble with hope, excitement, fear, so plagued with the awkwardness of uncertainty that I hardly remember how to perform the simplest motion.

First, a bombshell.

On arriving for work this morning, Helen informed me, without much apparent distress, that her husband's father had taken ill and that he would be leaving this afternoon for the family home. He expected to be away for a week.

Somehow, this information was of tremendous importance to me. I felt something rising from my most inhibited and unacknowledged depths. It seemed to be taking form on my face as a monstrous, diabolical leer, so that I actually had to check its expression by a firm application of muscular control.

The husband is gone—that hovering, menacing, familiar presence which seems to objectify my fear of judgment. He is gone. And I am here.

Next—I don't know precisely how it happened (perhaps it was our talk about the illness of her father-in-law)—but during coffee I began to talk to Helen about my childhood. Not much, just a little, about the isolation and the loneliness, my father's spells of oppression, my mother's timidity. I was speaking in a rather precise, objective, reminiscent and reflective way, certainly not displaying any attitude of self-commiseration.

But quite unexpectedly, Helen reached out and with deliberation—not accidentally—took, and for a brief moment, held my hand. At the same time, her eyes, her face gently smiling, conveyed a feeling of such tenderness that I was completely abashed—so much so that I quickly changed the subject.

I am confused and overwrought.

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My gaze never leaves her body as she moves about the office, though I try to appear busy. From time to time—I am sure this is something new—she turns to smile at me.

Thursday, August 26

The air is trembling with our breath. Each separate utilitarian motion of her body—her fingers pressing typewriter keys, her legs crossing and recrossing—every motion communicates a message of—of what? Invitation? Desire? I am certain of it.

Somehow I feel a stirring of new courage. I am frightened, but the old freezing fear, the primitive terror, has for once abandoned me. There is an old, savage strength growing from the archaic depths of my unexplored, my too long neglected self. Perhaps tomorrow . . .

Friday, August 27

Rose from my chair after coffee.

Embraced Helen.

Kissed Helen.

Helen slapped me.

She said, "Now now, you be a good boy—let's not have any more of *that*."

Actually I see no reason why I should be so terse and cryptic about this incident. It seems I have some difficulty putting it down in detail. Which isn't like me. This isn't the first time I've been the victim of humiliation, and I've always managed to reflect on these incidents with a degree of objectivity and good sense.

After all, Helen is a married woman. I was overstepping my bounds. Furthermore, if she had been more cooperative, there is no reason to expect, on the basis of my past performance, that I could have done anything more about it.

For you would have appeared, Papa—yes, you would, with your grim yellow face frowning down on us, on me, and that calculating, teasing . . .

Saturday, August 28

It is another very peaceful day. I have just been to the vivarium to clean the cages and change the food and water. I have a great deal to do in preparation for the new term, which begins next month. Yes, a plethora of tasks, both little and big.

I open up one drawer after another and close them in dismay. There are so many things in so many drawers. And I must begin to write up my latest study for the *Journal*. And there are the class notes, of course.

Whew! What heat. I hear plethoras of crickets in the grass above—beneath?—my window. Well, the college pays the electric bills, after all.

But Helen is also in the office—on my desk, in fact; and her presence is soothing, so soothing. Helen is a little caprice of mine, an experimental subject whom I have domesticated. I exposed the poor girl to so many shocks of electricity during my last study that I decided to

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adopt her and make it all up to her.

I should have known she would bear me no ill-will—rats rarely do. Adelaide, for instance, who sits so placidly now in Helen's lap while Helen strokes her little head over and over, crooning a kind of lullaby. What is it? I never heard anything like it before.

Helen doesn't seem to remember many of the words she used to know, though she uttered a sizable number when she was placed inside the experimental chamber, a sizable number. A spate, in fact, a plethora. See how she shudders when I throw her my most debonair smile. What a funny pet—not funny-strange, but funny-comical. She gives me the giggles, and it's ages since I've giggled.

Well, I confess I had a start just now. My father just came in the door asking for Helen. Now that's peculiar; he claims he's Helen's husband. He's shaking her, crying, asking me frantic questions. Not like Papa at all, but I'd know that rodent face anywhere. I shall exercise caution and remain bent over my notebook.

How could my father be Helen's husband? That would make Helen my mother, which is a sheer absurdity.

I wish he would go away.

Why don't you go away, Papa, and leave me alone?

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The February 1964 issue will be on sale January 2, 1964.

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **RICHARD O. LEWIS**

TITLE: ***A Matter of Protection***

TYPE: Crime Story

LOCALE: United States

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *Mr. F. I. Glen, night-club owner, believed a man must stand up for his rights. And Mr. F. I. Glen had his own way of standing up against threats and danger . . .*

THE INDIAN BEAT OUT A TOM-TOM rhythm with the heel of his hand on the hood of a parked car and gave out with a drunken war whoop that rose even above the music and chatter spilling out through the open windows of the night club.

Inside the club, called The Reservation, the Saturday night crowd was too busy with last-minute steaks and liquors to hear much of what might be going on outside.

But Bart, the bartender, heard it. And so did the owner-manager of the club, Mr. F. I. Glen.

Bart mopped his way down the bar to where Mr. Glen sat by the cash register. "That Indian's had too much firewater," he said. "He's been trying to do a war dance for the past half hour."

Mr. Glen nodded. "Who is he?"

Bart shrugged. "Some guy I picked up in town to fill in while Pete's getting over whatever ails him."

Mr. F. I. Glen's nose was thin and aquiline. The long lines in his cheeks revealed his 60 years, but the light in his dark eyes hinted at an inner fire that could spring into youthful flame at a moment's notice. "Better shut him up and bring him in before he gets any worse," he said.

Bart slipped out the back door and returned in less than two minutes with the Indian in tow.

The Indian wore a necklace of teeth over an open, beaded vest. A knife with a blade of authentic obsidian and a carved wooden handle dangled precariously from the belt

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of his sagging, imitation buckskins. His red and white face-paint was smeared beyond all pattern, his baggy eyes were bleary, and the two broken eagle feathers which drooped down from his headdress, one on either side of his nose, didn't add much to the picture of dignity he had been hired to portray.

Bart sat him down at a little table near the door to the kitchen and got him a cup of black coffee. "Drink this," he said. "Then you'd better wash up, change clothes, and go home. We won't be needing you any more."

The broken feathers bobbed as the Indian nodded slow acquiescence.

A young man had come in and seated himself at the bar. Bart hurried over. The man was scarcely twenty-five. His face was dark and insolent, his lips full, his eyes a bottomless black, and his long dark hair was combed neatly back to end in, Bart guessed, a duck-tail.

Bart didn't know exactly why, but such a face always did something to him, deep inside. It always filled him with a great desire to see how hard he could plant his fist in the middle of it. But instead of carrying out his desire, he smiled.

The young man named a brand of beer from the corner of his mouth, the single word dripping with arrogance.

Bart glanced at his watch and was about to tell him that it was too near closing time for service when the fellow made a slight gesture with his head in the direction of Mr. Glen. "He the manager?"

Bart nodded, uncapped a bottle of beer, and placed it and a glass on the bar.

Ignoring the beer, the fellow sauntered leisurely down the bar to a stool in front of the cash register. His eyes shifted around the room until Mr. Glen had finished checking out the three customers before him, then looked straight into Glen's face and through it. "Nice place you have here."

Glen nodded. "I like it," he said.

The fellow shifted his gaze to his polished fingernails. "Too bad if something should happen to it."

Glen's brow wrinkled. "Like what?"

"Like somebody tossing in a stick of dyn—" He broke off as two more customers approached the cash register.

Mr. Glen motioned for Bart to take over, then sat down with the young man at a table near the one where a broken eagle feather was bobbing slowly, but rhythmically, up and down in an empty coffee cup. "Let's have it."

"Sure. You'll get it. Straight." The black eyes again looked through Mr. Glen's face. "The boys in the big town are beginning to branch out a little. They are offering protection to little guys like you."

"And the cost of the protection?"

"Two hundred a month ought to be about right for you." He

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glanced at the juke box and the two pinballs. "And get rid of that junk. We'll put in our own machines."

"And if I don't take the protection—?"

The dark-eyed one suddenly leaned across the table, a smirk twisting his thick lips. "Remember the Bridle Club?" he asked slowly.

Mr. F. I. Glen's eyes narrowed, and the muscles at the corners of his thin mouth hardened. Yes, he remembered the Bridle Club. It had been blown apart one night, and the reason for the bombing was still a mystery—until now. Glen realized now that Old Sam Bridle had refused to pay protection money, had decided to protect the club himself. That's why he had been sleeping there the night of the blast . . .

Glen heard the Indian grunt drunkenly behind him, heard his chair slither back from the table, and, later, the slam of the back door.

Then he got slowly to his feet, his narrowed eyes glinting with an inner fire of anger. "Get out of here!" he said, scarcely able to control his voice. "And never come back!"

At the look in Mr. Glen's eyes an expression of fear flitted across the young man's face, but it was almost instantly replaced by the smirk. "We'll come back," he said, getting up from his chair. "And when we do, maybe you'll talk business—that is, if you're *able* to talk!"

He turned, sauntered arrogantly across the floor, and went out the front door.

Most of the cars were gone—only two or three still remained in the parking area among the ornamental trees and shrubs. One was a black sedan, its motor purring softly, with an indistinct figure at the wheel.

The young man had walked halfway to the sedan when strong fingers suddenly fastened themselves into his long hair and jerked his head violently back. At the same instant something sharp pierced the skin of his throat just below his right jaw line, and a broken eagle feather appeared above his upturned face.

"Reach fer yer gun," slurred a whiskey-laden breath, "an' I'll rip yer gullet open! Quick-like!"

The cut in the young man's neck was not painful—he scarcely felt it. But he was totally aware of the tiny stream of warm blood that had begun to trickle down into his shirt collar. He let his arms go limp.

"Old Sam Bridle was a good friend o' mine," the slurring voice continued. "Gave me drinks an' things when I needed 'em. An' if I was sure fer certain you killed him, I'd see if the blade of this here stone knife was long enough to reach from one of yer ears to the other!"

"Don't!" All arrogance had left the voice. It was now filled with terror, pleading. "Please! I didn't know . . ."

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Bart, alerted by a patron, came running across the gravel. "Stop it!" he shouted. "Let him loose!"

The Indian drew the young man's head farther back, placed a foot in the small of his back, and complied with Bart's command by giving a quick, forward thrust with the foot, a thrust that sent the fellow sprawling crazily in the general direction of the sedan.

"An' if I see you around here again, I'll lift yer hair—first! Then slit yer throat—later!"

"Go get washed up!" said Bart. And to the man struggling up from the driveway. "Get in that car and get the hell out of here!"

The scream of tires on gravel was dominated by the war whoop that split the night.

After the patrons and all the other help had left, Bart and Mr. F. I. Glen sat down at a table with coffee.

"Now what?" Bart asked.

Mr. Glen shrugged. "I don't know. But they'll be back. Or they'll send some other members of their gang."

"Maybe I should call the Sheriff."

Mr. Glen shook his head. "Won't do any good. They'll not be back tonight. They'll wait and strike when we least expect them. And we can't expect the Sheriff to post a guard here all night every night, indefinitely."

Bart nodded and sipped at his coffee. "Look, Mr. Glen," he said finally. "You can't expect to fight a whole mob of hoodlums alone. They'll blow this place apart, and maybe you with it. Like they did Sam Bridle. And that drunk I hired for our Indian tonight didn't help matters any. That young punk he pushed around will be back for blood!"

"I don't think it's a big gang," said Mr. Glen. "I think the big boys have all they can take care of where they are. I think this outfit is just a small group of upstarts trying to work the fringe area—isolated places in the country like this one."

"Even so," said Bart, "you can't fight them!"

"But I'm not going to pay them protection money," said Glen firmly.

Bart fished a cigarette from a crumpled package, lit it, and sipped coffee thoughtfully, a worry-frown creasing his broad forehead. "This is none of my business," he said at last. "But I'd guess you've saved a little money during the past twenty years or so you've had this place. I also know that you have had two good offers lately from people who have wanted to buy you out. Right?"

Glen nodded.

"You are interested in collecting Indian relics and Indian lore. That's why you named the club The Reservation, decorated it with things Indian, and had your help dress up as Indians. And I know that you're the best marksman with a bow and

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arrow in this area, and that you dearly love to hunt deer during the bow-and-arrow season, always using an authentic Indian bow and flint-tipped arrows. Now why not take time to enjoy your hobbies thoroughly?"

Bart saw the faraway look begin to creep into Mr. Glen's eyes, so he hurried on. "You could sell this place and keep your little cottage back on the knoll. You could hunt relics and deer wherever you wanted, travel through the western states, delve into Indian lore, get away from this whole deal. You could enjoy yourself without a care in the world . . ."

The dreamy look had left Mr. Glen's eyes almost as quickly as it had appeared. "I didn't tell you, Bart," he said, "but that was precisely what I had in mind to do—until tonight. Now I can't. I can't quit at the first sign of trouble."

"But you're too . . ." Bart had been about to say "too old." But he changed it quickly. ". . . you're too good a man, too interested in life, to throw it away fighting a gang of hoodlums!"

"A man must stand up for what he believes," Mr. Glen said slowly. "Otherwise, he is not really a man. I have a right to my life, my property, and my way of life. And I must fight any man or group of men who tries to deny me those rights without just cause." He got up from the table. "There is simply nothing else for me to do."

Bart had sensed it would be this way from the beginning. He tore a sheet from an order pad and scribbled on it with his pencil. "I got the license number of the black sedan," he said, handing over the paper. "In case you can use it." He, too, got up. "And, Mr. Glen," he finished evenly, "I'll be ready any time you need me."

A few minutes later the two men left—Bart in his car heading for town and home, and Mr. Glen walking slowly up the dark pathway toward the little tree-sheltered cottage on a knoll a few hundred yards behind the club. Although Mr. Glen had many friends in the world, now, as he walked under the remote stars, he had the strange feeling of being the loneliest man on earth . . .

Business went on at The Reservation as usual. Bart, however, could not help but note the change in Mr. Glen. He seemed preoccupied and far away, lost in a thought-world of his own. And Bart, too, was worried. He felt that the club might be blown to bits at any moment or, worse, that Mr. Glen might be waylaid some night as he walked homeward along the dark path.

But before the week was up, Bart sensed a difference. The clouds seemed suddenly to have lifted above Mr. Glen's head. The ghost of a smile had begun to play around the corners of his thin mouth, and a light had begun to glow deep in his dark eyes. And

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Bart grinned, for he knew that Mr. Glen had, in some way, solved a major problem to his own satisfaction.

It was two o'clock in the morning, nearly three weeks later, when the telephone on the little table beside Mr. Glen's bed jangled into sudden life. He fumbled for the handset in the dark.

"Yes?"

"Three men in a black sedan coming your way," came the cryptic answer.

"Thanks." Mr. Glen recognized the voice instantly as being that of Bill Hansen, one of his friends at the toll bridge that spanned the river a few miles away. Anyone heading in this direction from the big town either crossed that bridge or went many miles out of his way, and it had been a simple matter, at Mr. Glen's request, for the boys at the toll house to glance at the license number of every black sedan that crossed westward.

"Shall I send a welcoming committee?" Bill wanted to know.

"I'll greet my own guests," said Mr. Glen, and quickly hung up.

Without turning on any lights he slid into brown trousers and shirt, donned a pair of soft moccasins, and went into the other room. He found his rack of arrows and let his fingers explore the flints that tipped the shafts. In this manner it was quite easy to distinguish between the hunting arrows and the war arrows, for the flint tips of the hunting arrows had "ears" which permitted them to be bound securely into the end of the shaft. When imbedded in a carcass, a strong pull on the shaft of such an arrow would bring out the entire arrow, flint tip intact. The war arrows, however, had no such securing protuberances and were bound more loosely into the tip of the shaft. Once a warrior was struck with such an arrow, a tug at the shaft would do little more than extract the shaft, leaving the flint tip firmly imbedded.

Mr. Glen selected three of the war arrows, a short bow he had fashioned of tough hickory the year before, and several strips of rawhide. Then he slid silently out the back door and trotted softly down the star-lit pathway toward the club. He had no definite plan in mind; the game would have to play itself. He was heavily outnumbered, but the element of surprise was wholly in his favor.

He had scarcely reached the shelter of the ornamental trees and shrubs of the parkway before a black sedan passed slowly by along the country road. Moments later it returned, lights out and motor scarcely audible, to pass the club again and come to a halt a hundred yards or so up the road.

Mr. Glen waited until he saw a crouched figure enter the driveway from the road. He made certain the man was alone, then he rested

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his bow and arrows against a shrub and fell in behind the figure, as silent as a shadow.

At the corner of the club the man halted in the dark, bent lower, and thumbed a cigarette lighter into life. He was about to touch the flame to the end of a fuse when Mr. Glen's lithe 160 pounds landed squarely on the center of his back and sent him sprawling, his face rooting the gravel.

"One sound out of you," whispered Mr. Glen, "and you are a dead man." He punctuated the sentence by slugging the man behind the right ear with his fist. After that it took but a minute or two to gag the half-stunned man with a handkerchief and to tie him hand and foot with the rawhide.

Glen picked up the bomb. It was made up of four sticks of dynamite taped together and a fuse quite a few feet in length. The long fuse, once lighted, would have given the hoodlums ample time to cover many miles before the explosion occurred.

Taking the bomb with him, Mr. Glen picked up his bow and arrows and slipped out of the driveway and across the road to the deep grass beyond. There he made his way softly and carefully until he reached a spot not ten feet away from the parked black sedan. Then he squatted on his heels and waited.

Long minutes dragged by, and the two men in the car became increasingly restless.

"He should be back by now," one said finally. "Something—something must have happened to him."

Mr. Glen recognized the voice as belonging to the young hoodlum who had visited the club a few weeks before.

"He's just having trouble getting a window open or lighting the fuse," answered a heavier masculine voice.

"Maybe that wild Indian . . ."

"You and your wild Indians!" grunted the other. "Shut up! He'll be back in a minute or two."

But the passing of more minutes belied his prediction, and the owner of the familiar voice stuck his head out the window to look back along the dark road. "I'll bet that Indian's got to him."

"If you're worried," snapped the other, "go back and see what's happened!"

"Not me! I had one run-in with that painted devil, and that's enough!"

"Then we'll both go have a look."

Mr. Glen waited until they had left the car, crept cautiously down the road, and entered the driveway. Then he went to the sedan, shortened the fuse of the bomb with his knife, split the end of it to expose the powder, lighted it with a match, and laid the dynamite carefully on the front seat.

When he reached the shelter of the ornamental shrubs, he saw that the two men had untied their companion who was now seated on the ground and rubbing his head.

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"Help him up," commanded the one with the heavy voice.

As the other stooped over to obey, Mr. Glen released his first arrow. Almost instantly after the twang of the bow, the bent figure straightened, emitted a scream of terror, and fell to one side.

The one sitting on the ground leaped to his feet, and twin streaks of flame seared the night.

Mr. Glen heard the *splat* of a slug in a shrub nearby and felt a slight tug at the left sleeve of his shirt. He crouched lower, picked up a small handful of pebbles, and tossed them over the heads of the men. The two with drawn guns wheeled about as the pebbles struck the gravel beyond them and fired rapidly in that direction.

"He'll scalp me!" sobbed the man on the ground. "He'll scalp us all!"

"Get him to his feet," snapped the heavy-voiced man, "and let's get out of here!"

The other stooped to lend a hand, but straightened abruptly, screamed, leaped skyward as if to clutch a handful of stars, and began spinning round and round like a dog chasing its tail.

The one with the heavy voice awaited no further developments. He fired a random shot, took to his heels, and passed within ten feet of Mr. Glen as he raced down the driveway to the road.

Mr. Glen casually fitted his last arrow and drew its feathers back to his right ear. "In your memory, Sam Bridle," he said reverently, and released the shaft.

The fleeing figure faltered in mid-stride, a hundred feet or so short of the parked car, and toppled.

Mr. Glen didn't know whether the man had screamed or not, for, at the same instant the arrow struck, the black sedan came completely apart with a blast of sound that echoed back from the hills beyond his cottage.

He waited until the other two terror-stricken men had reached their companion and all three had begun to stagger along the road past the pile of junk that had once been a car; then Mr. Glen gave vent to an authentic Indian war whoop that greatly increased the drunken pace of the three hoodlums.

A few minutes later Mr. Glen retrieved his shafts and had noted with satisfaction that the end of each was wet and slippery and that the war points of all were missing.

A grim smile played at the corners of his thin mouth as he walked slowly up the path toward the little cottage. He wondered how three hoodlums, without means of transportation and with trousers dripping with blood, would manage to reach their destination. He also wondered what strange story they would eventually be forced to tell the surgeon who, of necessity, would be needed to probe for the painfully imbedded war heads.

A week later the mystery of why

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a black sedan, stolen six months previously, should have been blown to bits on a country road near The Reservation still remained unsolved; and Mr. Glen shook hands with Bart and the new owner of the club, bade them goodbye, drove his station wagon out of the driveway, and headed toward the main highway that would take him westward and, eventually, into New Mexico, his first stop. There he would visit for a time with his mother. She was nearly 80 now, and he hadn't seen her for a number of years.

The little smile played at his lips again, for he knew that as soon as he entered the New Mexico reservation and met his mother and her numerous friends he would promptly loose his identity as Mr. F. I. Glen, and would once again become simply Fox in Glen, the name his his proud mother, a full-blooded Apache, had given him on the day of his birth.

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **BEN HECHT**

TITLE: ***The Sunset Kid***

TYPE: Horse Racing Swindle

LOCALE: Hollywood, California

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *Moony Dan played a dangerous game: he outswindled swindlers, outsharped sharpies, and trimmed the big-shot bookies. And always the stake was high—his own life . . . a dazzling story.*

I KNEW HIM WHEN HE WAS CALLED the Sunset Kid and also Moony Dan. The first name came to him because he used to drive to the Santa Monica beach late every afternoon and watch the sun go down. He said it made him lucky. And if there was ever a man who needed a lot of luck, it was the Sunset Kid. For the Kid was a crook who devoted himself to swindling members of the underworld.

He specialized in trimming big-shot bookies and professional card gamblers. Among these he was called a "thief," which is the name illegal gamblers righteously pin on any kind of con man. Yet knowing the Kid for a thief, they let him come around and swindle them year after year. They played cards with him and took his bets on horses, and even went in on deals with him—and always got trimmed.

The Kid prospered as a thief because not only luck but psychology was on his side. The psychology was the egoism of the big-shot crooks whom he swindled, plus the ennui in which they lived, plus their childlike interest in everything crooked.

They were wise guys who knew all the angles and who boasted that no thief could hang anything on them. The fact that the Kid constantly disproved this theory made

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them only eager for "a return match." And it was understood between the Kid and his victims that they would have to catch him only once. There was a lot of fascination in it for the suckers, watching a man fool them with his life at stake on a slip-up.

The name Moony Dan came to the Kid as a result of his unusual fondness for women. This is an uncommon trait among crooks, whose relation to women is likely to be crude and sketchy. Women are a minor trouble and a lesser delight in their lives.

It was otherwise with the Sunset Kid, alias Moony Dan. His love affairs had been always as important to him as his crimes. At thirty-five he was paying alimony to two ex-wives—a fact which made his underworld contacts regard him as a bigger sucker than any of the wise guys he fleeced.

"I don't pay them money because the law tells me to," the Kid told me. "I pay it because I owe it to them, on account of they once made me happy."

This was five years ago. I asked the Kid another question at that time. He was a good-looking physical specimen. I asked him how he had stayed out of the war.

"My heart," he said. "I've got a ticker that can't take much strain. Sometimes I've got to stay in bed for a couple of days at a time."

"Sorry to hear that," I said.

"It works out," the Kid smiled. "I get to do my practice—and figuring—that way." The practice, I learned, was with a deck of cards, and the figuring was a new swindle to work on the wise guys.

I was with the Kid when he met Annie Bond, and I saw a thing happen that is seldom believable when you read about it. I saw two people fall in love at first sight like a pair of cymbals coming together. It happened so quickly and reasonlessly that I thought they were both kidding for my benefit. It wasn't only love that sat down with us at that back table in the Mexican restaurant. Death also modestly introduced himself.

The Kid was always a neat, well-dressed fellow. He had a moody, somewhat sarcastic-looking face and a crop of curly black hair. I'd always thought him a normally attractive man. But looking at him as Annie Bond sat beside him, I saw a man of beauty. Emotion seemed to give him a new face.

I didn't know Annie well enough to know how deep or how novel was the look she turned on the Sunset Kid. In a girl of virtue and modesty, it would have been pretty convincing. But Annie was of another category. She was no tramp, for she worked hard for a living. As an entertainer in this somewhat shabby Mexican night spot, Annie sang twenty or thirty songs an evening, changed her costumes several times, and did a few dance numbers.

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But she was a girl who had had bad luck with men. Beginning when she was twenty, which was eight years before she looked at the Sunset Kid, she had always picked the wrong man or, rather, been picked by him.

She had come to Hollywood from Amarillo, Texas—red-haired and shapely, with a fair singing voice and a wagonload of temperament. Her tops had been a few bit parts in the studios, and she had slid down from there. She sang in out-of-the-way cafés when "she got a break," she told me once. The rest of the time she clerked in stores or waited on tables or risked her life for fifty dollars a day as a stunt rider in a Western movie. She was good on a horse. And she had earned her own living every week of the eight years.

The bad luck in her love affairs came out of the fact that she attracted men who were weak and floundering around with a half talent and a half manhood. They were apt to be entertainers on the skids like herself, or idlers with an angle, or overdressed errand boys for mysterious big shots. There hadn't been too many, but there had been enough to make Annie Bond, at twenty-eight, a far cry from the innocent who had left Amarillo. The red hair was still there and the shapeliness and the unafraid lift of her neck. But the eight years had left a dust on her heart and a sneer in her eyes.

I thought of this as I saw Annie Bond staring at the Sunset Kid ten minutes after I had introduced them. She didn't return the Kid's smile, and there was none of his radiance in her look. But something somber and far-away had come into her face that made her seem like someone just born.

I saw Annie Bond and the Sunset Kid four months later. A car honked at me as I was walking to my hotel in Beverly Hills. The Kid was behind its wheel, and Annie, her hair blowing in the wind, was beside him.

"Come on along," the Kid said. "We're taking a little ride to Santa Monica."

We reached the beach in time. The sun was resting like a red hoop on the horizon. We parked and the Kid watched it, almost as avidly as Annie Bond watched him. Her eyes were wide with love, and the eight Hollywood years were gone from her face.

The last red sliver of the sun dropped out of sight and the Kid smiled. "My lucky piece. I'm going to need it next week. . . . Mind if I tell him, Annie?"

Annie didn't mind.

"We're getting married," the Sunset Kid said. "On the fifteenth. Because fifteen is my lucky number. In the morning at ten thirty. And at nine o'clock that night I'm going into business. Quittin' all my tricks and settling down as a regular citizen."

"He's buying a half interest in

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The Congo Room," Annie's husky voice was eager. The Congo was one of Hollywood's newest night clubs, complete with name band, low-key lighting, and a run of celebrities. "Dan's going to be the manager. And I'm going to sing there."

"In a silver gown with silver slippers," said the Kid. He took her hand and kissed it. "Her name'll be up in lights," he said. "Annie Bond, the Texas Nightingale."

"If I make good," said Annie.

"You've made good," the Kid said softly.

"I'm so dizzy I don't know if I'm comin' or goin'," said Annie. "Imagine something like this happening to me! I don't mean my name in lights. I mean Dan."

"To both of us," Dan smiled. "That's why I'm quittin' the tricks. They used to be the only fun there was. Now they don't mean anything."

I thought of some questions.

"Buying in on the Congo is going to require a bank roll, isn't it?"

"Ten grand, cash," he answered.

"Have you got it?" I asked.

"I'm getting it on the fifteenth," the Sunset Kid smiled.

Seven men sat in Rocky Blair's elegant living room. Three of them were bodyguards, three were Rocky's friends and assistants. The seventh was Rocky. Six were in shirt sleeves, collars undone. It was one P.M., June fifteenth, and the day was hot.

Rocky was having his breakfast on a tray. He was fully and resplendently dressed, as became a king, regardless of the hour or temperature. Rocky's empire consisted of five hundred bookies—and several unallied and legal enterprises which he ran as a sort of hobby. Chief among these was the Boulevard Florist Shop in the center of Hollywood. It was in the rear of the rambling, sweet-scented establishment that Rocky had his "home office."

Out of this aromatic chamber Rocky operated his five hundred bookies. For guiding them financially, delivering them out of bondage when the police grew fractious, and smoothing their ways with the juices of bribery and corruption in high and low places, Rocky pulled down an average of a hundred thousand dollars each week.

There was no syndicate involved. There was only Rocky, sitting, as he sat this hot day, as the one and only king of the territory between Los Angeles and Las Vegas.

Rocky was a finicky man with a round, tight face that nobody had ever seen unshaved. He had, despite the elegance of his attire, the look of a well-barbered pugilist sitting in his corner between rounds, with motionless, determined eyes, and lips pinched together—and waiting. The posture and expression came naturally to him, for he had sat in a ring corner as a pugilist during five of his youthful years.

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Rocky sat in silence with his six guests as he drank his coffee. The three bodyguards were mugs with nothing to say. The three assistants, more capable of conversation, specialized in being as tight-mouthed as their boss.

A musical gong sounded three times. It was the front doorbell. Rocky continued sipping his coffee and nobody moved. The gong sounded again, and Rocky looked at Gil, the smallest of the bodyguards, but who wore a gun and holster near his left armpit, visible only when his coat was off, as now.

Gil stood up and moved to the front door. Two attempts to wipe out Rocky Blair had been made that month.

The six listened to the outer door open. There were no shots and no bomb came rolling into the room, from which they knew that this was a social caller.

Gil re-entered the silent room.

"It's that Moony Dan," he said. "What's the thief want?"

"To see you, Rocky," said Gil.

"Throw him out," said the fat-faced Tubby Fields, who was considered Rocky's "brains." "Don't waste any time."

"Shut up," said Rocky. Everybody waited a full minute, and then Rocky concluded his speech, "Show the gentleman in."

Gil went into the hallway again and undid the two steel chains on the door. He returned leading the Sunset Kid.

Nobody spoke. Rocky peered out of the living-room window into the street beyond the wide front lawn.

"You got no car," said Rocky.

"I came in a taxi," the Kid said.

"On purpose, eh?" Rocky scowled. "What the hell for?"

"I felt lucky," the Sunset Kid answered.

All seven men in the room put on the same expression. It was an expression of indifference. And all seven felt the same lift of excitement. The Kid had announced openly that he had come to steal money again from Rocky Blair.

"Throw him out," said Tubby.

Nobody moved and the Kid sat down. Rocky finished his coffee. Anger fumed in his eyes. This monkey had taken him three times—once in a poker game in this same room. With seven guys watching every move of the thief's fingers, and putting a fresh deck of cards into play every fifteen minutes, this trimmer had taken him for twenty-eight hundred dollars. And all in the last pot, which was the way he always worked. You got four kings and he came up with his signature—four aces—and blew.

"I ain't playin' cards," said Rocky.

"Glad to hear it," said the Kid. "Takes too long to make a killing at cards. Sometimes you have to sit around for hours."

"I make the suggestion a thoid time," said Tubby Fields. "Throw this fella out."

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Rocky scowled at his "brains." Usually he followed Tubby's advice. Tubby, he always said, had a "fourth sense." He knew things in advance. But Rocky didn't want to throw the Kid out. It would be a confession of weakness, and besides, how could a thief trim him in his own house with seven guys watching his every move?

"I'm doin' this," Rocky answered Tubby. "So shut up." Turning to his visitor, he added, "What kind of play do you want?"

"I feel lucky on horses today," said the Kid.

All seven in the room, including even Tubby Fields, were glad nobody had thrown the visitor out—because this was going to be something good. The Kid was going to try to pull a "past-post" betting gag on the boss, right under their noses. That was different from pulling it on the lugs behind the bookie counters. All seven remembered, in a minimum of words, the Kid's work as a betting thief. He had made a lot of cleanups placing bets after a race was over, and betting on a horse that had already won. One of the simpler ways he had used was calling up three minutes before a race had started and putting down bets on the race that was going to follow. There was a girl taking the bets. And the Kid would keep on talking to the girl over the phone, telling her some story he had found out, about her sister, and offering to help get the sister out of some trouble she was in. And then, all of a sudden, he would say, "Put five hundred on Sun Up to win in the second." The girl taking the bets would forget to look at the clock because she was excited over the Kid saving her sister, and she would mark down: "Sun Up—$500—Second Race." And the second race would be already run and over.

The Kid would come around at five to collect his winnings, and the girl would be fired.

There were other tricks the Kid had worked. Rocky remembered them all, including the "invisible-ink" trick. The Kid had handed in a betting slip with the names of three horses on it to win the third, fourth, and fifth races. On the slip was also written the name of a horse that had already won the first race. But it was written in invisible ink. The bookie couldn't see it when he filed the betting slip. By five o'clock, when the Kid came around to collect, the invisible ink had "come up" and become visible. And the bookie had to pay off on a horse that had been bet on after he had won the race.

Tubby had figured that one out, but there was no proving it. And you couldn't knock a guy off without catching him guilty. This was the unwritten law in Rocky's kingdom just as it was the written law outside it.

Not only Rocky but all the others here in Rocky's home knew every past-post betting gag that had ever

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been pulled. And all seven went to work at once. That is, they alerted themselves.

"Sit over here," said Tubby Fields. He moved the Sunset Kid away from the window overlooking the wide lawn and arranged his chair so that the visitor's back was to it. There would be no signaling from outside.

Nate, the oldest and wisest bookie among Rocky's retainers, opened the window and looked out. Rocky's house stood in a sparsely built and would-be fashionable neighborhood. There was no house on its immediate left or right. The street was wide and there were no houses of any sort on the opposite side.

Rocky looked at the clock on the mantelpiece. It was 1:10.

"You got some nag picked?" Rocky asked.

He winked at Tubby, and Tubby winked back. The others also winked at one another.

The Kid looked at the seven men all now openly studying his hands, feet, and face. A rueful smile turned his mouth.

"I like Count Monty in the first," he said, "but I haven't made up my mind yet."

"You want a little more time, eh?" Rocky sneered. Count Monty was running at 1:30.

"That's right," said the Kid. "Do you mind if I use your bathroom, Mr. Blair?"

"Go right ahead," said Rocky. "There's one in the hallway."

"Yes, I know," the Kid said. He stood up and started out of the room. At a nod from Rocky, two of his guests also stood up and followed the Kid as far as the bathroom door. They remained outside.

"He ain't gonna try," said Gil, a little regretfully. "You scared him off, Rocky."

"He'll try," said Tubby Fields.

"Naw," Rocky grinned coldly. "He was feelin' big when he came in here. He ain't feelin' so big now."

"Too bad," one of the guards said. "We could 'a' caught him."

"He's gonna try," Tubby repeated.

"Okay," said Rocky. "Then we'll catch him. I been wantin' to catch that thief a long time."

Inside the bathroom, the Sunset Kid turned the key in the lock and smiled to himself. He knew the talk that was being made in the room he had left. He knew that Tubby Fields was on the telephone getting the right time and setting his watch by it, and the clock on the mantelpiece. One thirty would be one thirty in Rocky's living room, the same as it was in the rest of California, including the Santa Anita Race Track.

But the Kid was smiling at something more important going on in the room he had left—its psychology. He knew that at 1:33, one minute after the first race at Santa Anita had been run, Rocky would take his bet—on the horse that had won.

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The Kid switched on the electric light over the medicine cabinet, turned on both faucets to cover the sound, and then unscrewed the electric bulb. He sighed as he worked. He was glad this was his last trick—just this one for Annie—nothing else. He removed the tinfoil lining from a package of cigarettes and shaped it into a penny-sized disk. Placing the tin foil in the socket, he screwed the bulb tightly into place.

There was a faint pop, and the Kid knew a fuse in some basement box had been blown. He unscrewed the bulb again and removed the tin foil. He had knocked out the bathroom current, and the odds were twenty to one that the adjoining living room was on the same fuse.

If it was, he was "in business." If it wasn't—the Kid shrugged mentally—he would have to dream up another gag. He made a deep wish. "Annie, make it work," he muttered. Then he rinsed his hands quickly, turned off the water, and opened the door.

"You're sittin' here," said Tubby Fields as the Kid preceded the bodyguards into the living room. "The same chair."

The Kid sat down.

Rocky looked at the clock. It was 1:17.

"You made up your mind yet?" he asked.

"I think I'll skip the first race," the Kid smiled.

Rocky's face stiffened and darkened.

"We ain't taking bets after starting time," Tubby Fields said quietly. "Don't try pullin' any."

"Shut up," Rocky said. "I'm concentratin'." His eyes, tense and angry, were on the Kid's face.

"It's one twenty-five," said Tubby after a long silence.

"Okay," said Rocky, "turn on the radio. We'll catch the first race."

Biggy, one of the guards, stepped to the radio cabinet. Nobody watched him. All eyes remained on the thief.

"No bets after the race starts," said Rocky. "This is your last chance. You want to make a play?"

"I don't feel it," said the Kid.

"Hell!" Biggy was muttering. "This thing ain't workin'."

Hearing Biggy's words, the Sunset Kid relaxed. He knew he was "in business." The rest was psychology.

"What ain't workin'?" Rocky asked irritably.

"The radio," said Biggy. "He's knocked it out."

"Who's knocked it out?" Rocky kept his eyes on the visitor.

"The Kid," said Biggy.

"He ain't touched it," said Rocky firmly. "Get the set out of my bedroom. Hurry up."

Tubby Fields stood up and cried out harshly. "He's done it, I tell ya! The gag is on! Throw him out!"

"He's done nothin'," said Rocky. "I been watchin' him. Shut up now."

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Biggy returned with a smaller radio set and plugged it into a light socket. Rocky looked at the mantelpiece clock. It was 1:30.

"This one don't work either," Biggy growled. "He's busted this one likewise."

The Kid's eyes were on Tubby Fields. He waited for the "brains" to call the shot—a blown fuse. But the "brains" was too busy watching to think. Besides, the Kid was gambling that the theory of fuse boxes was unknown to them.

"Is the wire cut?" one of Rocky's aides asked.

"The wire's okay," said Biggy. "There's somethin' the matter inside. It don't even go on."

Dimly, Rocky was aware that this was a feint of some kind, and he kept his eyes on every flick of the thief's eyes.

"That's too bad," said the Sunset Kid. "I would have liked to hear that race run. I had a hunch on Count Monty. But I'm glad I didn't bet. Because I got a bigger hunch right now, a real feeling. Blue Skies. Care to take a bet on Blue Skies, Mr. Blair?"

Rocky looked at the clock. It was 1:33. The first race had ended a minute ago—if they'd got away quick.

"I'll put three thousand on Blue Skies to win," said the Sunset Kid. "It's no different playing my hunch now than ten minutes ago. You don't know and I don't know what's happened."

As he talked, the Kid removed six five-hundred-dollar bills and put them on the breakfast tray at Rocky's elbow.

"You taking my bet?" he asked.

Rocky's hand reached for the money. "I'm taking that bet," he said.

The room was silent. There had been no signal. The thief had sat in the middle of the room, his back to the street fifty feet beyond. Tubby waddled to the phone and called a number. The room waited for his announcement.

"Tubby Fields," said Tubby huskily into the mouthpiece. "Gimme the results in the first at Santa Anita."

He listened and hung up slowly.

"Blue Skies by a nose," he announced. "Paid seven to two."

"You dirty thief," Rocky said. "You've stole ten grand off me."

"I didn't steal it," said the Sunset Kid softly. "I won it."

"You stole it," Rocky repeated. His hand moved slowly under his coat. He was forgetting the unwritten law.

"If you want to welsh on a bet you took," said the Kid, "go ahead. You don't have to shoot me. You just don't pay off."

Rocky's hand stopped moving. A gambler couldn't do anything against that kind of talk. It was an easy psychology play from here in, and the Kid kept all smugness out of his voice.

"You made the bet after looking

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at the clock," he said. "But if you feel you've been taken, in your own house, with all your smart pals watching me, you don't have to pay. That's up to you, Mr. Blair."

"I'm payin'," said Rocky.

He took ten thousand-dollar bills out of his wallet.

"I'll give you five more," he said quietly, "if you tell me how you done it."

The Kid smiled at the trap. "I got a feeling all of a sudden," he answered naively. "It came a little late, but it was a genuine feeling."

He took the bills from Rocky's hand and picked up his own three thousand. The others watched and were silent.

"You're a lousy thief," said Rocky, without emotion. "You never won an honest nickel in your life. I'm payin' off, because I took the bet with my eyes open. But I'm gonna get the money back. I'm gonna find out what kind of a gag you pulled. And when I find out, I'm comin' after you. And you won't need no money after that."

The Sunset Kid waited patiently for Rocky to finish his long, slow speech.

"I'm sorry you've got that attitude, Mr. Blair," he said. "But thanks for payin' off."

He nodded, added, "So long," and walked slowly out of the room.

Outside in the bright afternoon, the Sunset Kid walked toward a boulevard intersection two blocks distant. As he turned the corner he glanced back to see if anyone had followed him. The blazing street was empty of all life.

Four automobiles were lined up, one behind the other, at the boulevard curb. It was an odd collection of cars. The oddity lay in their coloring. One was black, one bright green, one red, and the fourth was yellow.

The Sunset Kid thought of the fifth and missing car, the light blue one. He resavored for a moment the thrill of catching a glimpse of it in the mirror over Rocky's mantelpiece, watching the bit of blue flash by. He had even noted in that brief swing across the mirror that Annie's hair was flying and her face grinning. She had flashed by at a good seventy.

The mystification of the seven men and the almost foolish simplicity of the gag kept the Kid grinning as he got into the red car. There had been five horses running in the first race. Each of the different colors of the five cars represented one of the running horses. Annie had sat getting the race over the car radio. As soon as the winner was called, Annie had jumped into the right car—blue for Blue Skies.

The Kid drove the red job to the car-rental garage out of which he had taken it three days ago. He returned an hour later to the boulevard curb and the three other rented cars. One by one, he restored them to their widely separated garage headquarters.

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It was nearly seven when the Kid had returned the last of the four rentals. He was weary and hot with driving. A quick look at the sky told him he was on schedule. He would be able to get to the beach in Santa Monica in time to watch the sun go down, with Annie. She would be waiting, parked at their usual front-row seat for the sunset, in the blue car.

There was no blue car parked when the Sunset Kid rolled up to the beach end of the street. He shut off the motor and sat staring at the sun going down.

Annie would drive up any minute. Annie had gone to buy something—a hot dog or sunburn lotion. The sun seemed to take a long time going down. The Kid tried to breathe casually. Annie would show. What were a few minutes of waiting? There was a whole life of Annie ahead now. The Kid turned on the car radio. Time passed faster when music was playing. It was seven thirty and the Kid hit a news broadcast and let it run.

Suddenly he took his eyes from the setting sun. He closed them and looked at nothing. The newscaster's voice filled the car:

"Los Angeles counted its one hundred and fortieth victim of reckless driving this afternoon. A car speeding along at seventy miles an hour down a Brentwood residential street crashed into a parked delivery truck. The driver of the car was killed instantly. Her name was Annie Bond, a young and beautiful café singer known as the Texas Nightingale."

When the Sunset Kid opened his eyes, the Pacific was dark. His hands were shaking and he couldn't move his legs to start the car. He laid his head on the wheel and cried.

Three days later, the Sunset Kid walked into Rocky Blair's Boulevard Flower Shop. A heavy-set man with a cauliflower ear was behind the main counter. He stared at the Kid and said nothing.

Biggy looked up from a picture magazine he was reading. He also said nothing, but walked to a door at the rear of the flower shop. He pressed a button three times. The heavy steel door opened.

"That fella's here," said Biggy. "That Moony Dan."

Rocky Blair came out, followed by Tubby Fields. Rocky went behind the flower counter. Biggy and Tubby took a place on each side of the Kid.

"I read about your girl," said Rocky. "She was killed in an accident after drivin' a blue car past my house. Around one thirty."

The Kid nodded.

"I been lookin' for you," said Rocky. He stared at the white face and the bloodshot eyes in front of him and asked harshly, "What do you want?"

"I want to buy some flowers," the Kid said.

"We're wastin' time," said Tub-

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by. "Take him into the office, Biggy."

"Shut up," Rocky scowled. "I'm waitin' on a customer. . . . What kind o' flowers do you want, Kid?"

"Roses," said the Sunset Kid." I want fifteen dollars' worth of roses sent every week to Miss Annie Bond. She's buried in Forest Lawn. I want the roses put on her grave every week for the next fifteen years. That'll be about ten grand. And seven hundred extra. I'm paying in advance."

The Kid put ten one-thousand dollar bills on the counter and added another seven hundred.

"That'll cover it," he said. "And if you sell the business or anything happens, I'd like you to fix it so the delivery keeps on."

Rocky Blair looked at the shaking hands and the bleared eyes in front of the counter.

"Mr. Fields will enter your order," said Rocky stiffly. "The flowers will be delivered as specified." He paused, scowled and added, "Take care of the man, Tubby, and give him a receipt." And Rocky walked back into his steel-doored office.

When I go to the Santa Monica beach, I stop in at an oyster bar that faces the ocean. It's a small and rather sloppy place, and the sea food is none too good. But I go there for a meal now and then because Dan Flato waits on me.

He used to be called the Sunset Kid.

His hands are still shaking and his eyes have kept the bleary look that came to them one time when he watched the sun go down. But the Kid doesn't watch the sun any more. He has a new hobby. When he waits on me his eyes look across the counter toward the street end where Annie Bond was going to meet him—that time.

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a new novelet by

EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **HUGH PENTECOST**

TITLE: ***The Man in Seat 12***

TYPE: Detective-Suspense Novelet

DETECTIVE: Eddie Barrows

LOCALE: New York City

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *Will and Joyce Reid were the perfect couple. Theirs was the ideal marriage. But Joyce suffered from a sickness—not alcoholism, not drugs. But like the rise and fall of the tide, it was always there . . .*

FOR SIX YEARS EDDIE BARROWS had lived with a secret that was like a knife in his heart. It had been a simple secret to begin with, involving only three other people. But with the passage of time the number of people had multiplied, and the process of multiplication had deepened the wound in Eddie's heart until it was almost unbearable.

Six years ago Eddie had been persuaded to keep the secret he'd stumbled on from the one person in the world for whom he'd give his life, without hesitation. Now, in crisis, if he told the secret to this one person the foundations of Eddie's life would collapse, and the respect and affection of that one person, which were the core of Eddie's existence, would turn to hate.

In this age of empty sophistication if one man says publicly that he loves another man, the word "queer" gets bandied about. But love is the only word to describe what Eddie felt for Willard Reid. Eddie loved Will Reid in a variety of ways. He loved him with the deep, unquestioning devotion of a Spaniel dog. He was proud of Will,

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and he loved him because the pride was justified. He was grateful to Will because at a moment when Eddie was headed for disaster, Will had trusted him, gone bond for him, given him a life to live. He loved him for all that.

In the fifteen years in which he'd worked for Will as a sort of confidential Jack-of-all-trades, Will Reid had treated him as a friend and an equal, although a dozen IBM computers couldn't have arrived at the total of the Reid fortune in dollars or the value of such items as what was still called "the Reid mansion" on Fifth Avenue, the breeding farm in Kentucky, the twenty-room beach house in Florida, the private plane, the cars, the fabulous collection of paintings, the jewels in the wall safe in Joyce Reid's dressing room. The Reid Foundation, of which Will was board chairman, contributed vast sums to scientific research, to medicine, to the arts, to education. In spite of all that colossal wealth there had never once been a patronizing note in Will's voice when he spoke to Eddie.

Once Eddie had waited for two hours outside the door of Will's office at the Foundation with what he considered an urgent message—Will was closeted with the famous director of a great mid-Western clinic. Afterward, Will chided him for it.

"Just remember one thing, Eddie," he said. "You're special. If you have something for me that you judge to be important, you can walk in on me and the President of the United States. When I don't trust your judgment any more, I'll tell you."

And Will made Eddie feel "special." He *was* special, by God! And he loved Will for that.

Eddie had only done two things in his life. He'd been a crooked horse jockey working out of the small-fair race tracks throughout the East and South—and he was Will Reid's trusted and confidential man. Will had saved him from the consequences of the first, and had made him into the second.

If you asked Eddie how Will had happened to pick him for this special job, he would give you a wry smile and tell you that he guessed he was just lucky. If you asked Will why he picked Eddie, you'd get something quite different. Will Reid's grandfather and father had amassed the huge Reid fortune. Will had inherited it and now administered it. But he was not just a rich man's son. He was a man with extraordinary good judgment about people and causes.

"Everybody in this world wants something from a man in my position," Will told his lovely wife, Joyce, when she asked him the question about Eddie. "Watch Eddie sometime, darling. This is a man without an ounce of greed in him. He's not awed by dollars. He is concerned only with basics—like mutual trust. He knows his place,

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and I don't mean anything snobbish by that. He has a positive genius for knowing the right moment to step forward and the right moment to fade into the background, the right moment to talk and the right moment to be silent. Can you think, offhand, of a single one of our elegant friends about whom we can say that? Until I met you, darling, I'd have said Eddie was the one person in the world perfectly tuned in on my wave length."

Joyce quoted that speech to Eddie the day he stumbled on the secret.

Joyce was the center of the secret.

She was having an affair with another man.

Eddie was forty years old the day he discovered Joyce Reid's secret, but he still looked like a boy. He was only five feet four inches tall and just four pounds over what had been his riding weight, B.W.—Before Will. You will be way out in left field if you think of Eddie as servile, or as a grateful, faithful nonentity.

They'd called him The Bandit on the tracks in the old days. He'd ride you right through the fence if you got in his way on the home stretch. He was tough as piano wire. He was a shrewd psychologist. He could think his own race and the other fellow's at the same time, and rarely be wrong.

Only Will Reid knew the truth about why Eddie had gone sour instead of rising to rank with the greatest riders of our time. Eddie was married when he was nineteen. He was one of the top apprentice riders in the country. One night he smashed up his car—and his wife. She lay for months in terrible agony. A dozen operations by the best surgeons in the country wiped out Eddie's bankroll and left him hopelessly broke.

But there had to be more operations. Eddie never hesitated. A dishonest buck would pay the doctors just as readily as an honest one, and was easier to come by in a hurry. In the end Eddie's wife died, in spite of everything. And shortly after that they caught him going for the gloves, as they say—which means pulling in a horse to lose a race on purpose. The Thoroughbred Racing Protective Bureau was new and tough in those days and they threw the book at Eddie, barring him from member tracks for life. Criminal proceedings were dropped only because of Will Reid's influence.

Eddie never rode again and he stayed away from horses, even on Will Reid's farm near Lexington—it hurt Eddie too much to be near them. But he was still all the things he had been—wire-tough, shrewd, a keen student of human nature. He was invaluable to Will Reid in areas that would have surprised many people. Some of America's most important people had received a "No" from the Reid Foundation, never dreaming they'd been turned

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down on the judgment of the little ex-jockey with the bright black eyes whom they mistakenly thought of as a sort of glorified chauffeur-and-handyman to Will.

The big crisis in Will Reid's life—and therefore in Eddie's—came six years after the day Eddie stumbled on the secret. That day six years ago had been crisp and cold, a New York December just before Christmas. Eddie knew that Will was particularly fond of a special brand of cigars made especially for The Players Club in Gramercy Park. Eddie had gone down to The Players late in the afternoon to buy a box as a Christmas present for Will.

He'd called Teddy Atkinson, the once-great jockey who was a member there, to arrange for a box to be ready for him. He'd picked up the box and started back across the west end of the Park with the idea of getting a taxi on Park Avenue South. He was walking along the iron fence that enclosed the park, looking at the wreaths and Christmas lights that decorated most of the once-elegant houses, when the front door of an old brownstone opened and a man and woman came out, arm in arm.

The woman was Joyce Reid.

Eddie, his coat collar turned up around his chin, stopped in his tracks. The cold he felt in his bones had nothing to do with the December temperature. No one needed to draw a map for him. Joyce and the man, whom Eddie recognized as a business friend of Will's, might just as well have shouted it at the top of their lungs. "We've been making love, and it has been a long-time and wonderful affair!"

A cab pulled up at the curb and the man helped Joyce in. He gave the driver an address, tipped his hat to Joyce, and watched the cab move away. Then he headed briskly downtown on foot.

Eddie leaned against the iron fence, wondering if he ordered his legs to carry him forward whether they'd obey. Joyce was Will's whole life these days. They'd been married two years ago, and Will loved her as Eddie had once loved his own wife.

A Christmas present for Will!

Eddie went home to his little two-room apartment just east of Madison and less than two blocks from the Reid mansion. He sat in the small living room, its walls decorated with photographs of famous race horses, past and present. He sat there, chain-smoking. He never drank, or this would have been a time to tie one on. What was his responsibility? What should he do? Didn't Will have a right to know? Shouldn't Eddie tell him?

There was another way to ask the question. Should he kill Will in cold blood? Because that's what telling him would mean. He had no positive proof. Joyce could have a dozen explanations for being in that brownstone in Gramercy Park.

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Will would believe her, because he would have to believe her. Eddie didn't need proof. But Will would need proof in spades, and even then he probably wouldn't believe.

The front-door buzzer rang in Eddie's apartment about ten o'clock that night. He wasn't expecting anyone. He pressed the release catch and opened his door. He heard the quick, energetic patter of footsteps on the stair.

It was Joyce. Her dark-red hair, worn in a long bob, brushed the collar of her mink coat. Her gray-green eyes were bright, as if something had overstimulated her. She was taller than Eddie, beautiful, beautifully made.

"Will you invite me in, Eddie?" she asked in her husky voice.

He stood aside. She walked past him into the living room. She stood for a minute, looking around. Then she gestured toward the pictures on the wall.

"You still love them, even though you won't go near them," she said.

He closed the door and stood with his back to it. He didn't say anything.

She took off the mink coat and tossed it, impatiently, onto the couch. She was wearing a green wool dress that accentuated her figure. As they say of a good-looking thoroughbred, she had "all the proper furniture." Only a few hours ago Eddie had thought of this loveliness as belonging to Will—forever, until death do us part. Now he knew it was Everyman's—perhaps even his if he chose to bargain for it.

But he didn't know Joyce. She was one of the few people he had misread in his life. He was still misreading her.

"What are you going to do about it, Eddie?" she asked quietly, her eyes unblinkingly fixed on him.

He needed to stall for time. He moistened his lips. Will's woman! Damn her!

"I saw you this afternoon, Eddie," she said, "and I know that you saw us. I came as quickly as I could because I know it must be hurting you badly." There was actually compassion in the gray-green eyes!

"Hurting *me!*" he said, his voice thick.

"It's not hurting Will at the moment because he doesn't know about it, Eddie," she said. She took a step toward him. "It's not like you to be horrified, Eddie, or to take a high moral tone. You wouldn't be doing that if anyone but Will were involved. Will you let me tell you my side of it, as though I were a stranger, married to a stranger? If you'll make a judgment in those terms, Eddie, whatever you decide to do will be right."

There was no harm in listening. It might help him to regain his balance. Will, he knew, had gone to a smoker at the University Club. He wouldn't be home till very late. There was time to listen.

"Sit down if you like," he said.

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He was fishing clumsily in his coat pocket for a cigarette.

She sat down on the couch, but only until he had taken the chair opposite her. Then she was up again, prowling the room. He watched her, his eyes squinted against the smoke of his cigarette.

"If I had an incurable disease," she said, "and the doctor had given me, say, a year to live I'd have a decision to make. To tell Will, or not to tell him. By not telling him I could give him a full happy year—until the very end. By telling him we would both be tortured for the rest of my time. I wouldn't hesitate a minute. I'd keep it from him."

"You couldn't choose not to have the disease," Eddie said. "You couldn't help yourself. This is different."

"I hope to make you see that it isn't different," Joyce said. "I'm thirty-two years old, Eddie. Will is forty-five. I didn't marry until I was thirty, not because I didn't have the chances, but because I never fell in love—and even if I had, I knew I couldn't keep my end of the bargain. Then I met Will. For the first time I wanted to be what someone wanted me to be. I was in love, I thought. I could be cured, I thought."

"Cured?" He raised his eyes to her.

"If you'd discovered tonight that I was an alcoholic, would you immediately assume that I didn't love Will?"

"No."

"If you found out I was a drug addict, would you assume I didn't love him?"

"No. They're both a kind of sickness."

She made a despairing gesture with her eloquent hands. "What I have is also a sickness, Eddie. It's a physical torture—just like the craving for liquor or drugs is for someone else. I've fought it until I'm bloody from the battle. I've tried to run away from it. Before I married Will I tried psychoanalysis. I've even thought the desire might be cut out of me with a surgeon's knife. It's no good, Eddie. Like the rise and fall of the tide, it's there, always there. Don't look at me that way, Eddie. I've tried the church. I've tried *everything*."

"And yet you married Will," he said.

"I was in love with him," she said. Her voice rose. "I *am* in love with him. For a delirious period of time just before and just after we were married I believed Will was the answer. I thought I'd found an all-satisfying world. And then—then the tide came in again. It's hopeless, Eddie. Completely hopeless."

"So you put the horns on him," Eddie said bitterly.

"Believe me," she said. "When I found it was no use I made up my mind to go to Will, tell him, and leave him. But I couldn't. He loves me so much, Eddie. I'm his whole life. To tell him would be to kill

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him. And I say it again—I love him. And so—" She let out her breath in a long sigh. "So I live in two worlds—Will's world and another world. Most of my time is devoted to making certain he never finds out. Tonight, for the first time in my life, I was careless. I walked out of that house with—with Paul instead of coming out alone. My one moment of carelessness—and you were there."

"So you can't help yourself. So you plan to go on double-crossing Will," he said.

"Listen to me, Eddie. Do I deprive Will of anything he wants from me?"

"Fidelity!" Eddie exploded.

"Please, Eddie, listen to me. Do I deprive him of my companionship? Do I deny him the physical love he wants and needs? Do I make a public spectacle of him? Do I——"

"You've made a public spectacle of him to me—and to X number of men," Eddie said.

"But he doesn't know!" she cried. "And he'll never know unless you tell him. His world is complete now and it will always be complete unless you choose to destroy it. There'll never be another moment of carelessness. You're an expert on odds, Eddie. If Will finds out the truth he has no chance of happiness. But the chances of his finding out, barring you, Eddie, are what would you say—a hundred to one?"

He sat staring at her. There was at least one truth in what she said. Will's was an all-encompassing love. He gave all of himself and all of his world to it. Generous, considerate, and giving, always giving. But he took, too. Eddie guessed the air Will breathed was filtered through his love for Joyce, that it was a part of his blood-pumping mechanism. Telling him the truth would be like severing Will's main artery.

"I could go down on my knees to you, Eddie," Joyce said "I could make you promises. They'd be lies. The tide would come in again. I can only promise you this and mean it—my first concern will always be to save Will from hurt. So it's up to you, Eddie."

He didn't give her an answer then. But a few days later, after sweating it out by himself, he made a decision. He'd keep the secret as long as he was satisfied that Will was happy, or that he wasn't being made a public joke of behind his back.

For six years Eddie had kept the secret. For six years he had been painfully aware of the rise and fall of the tide. For six years he had watched Will's love for Joyce deepen. The blow would be even more devastating now if it came.

And it came—just two weeks short of six years to that day in Gramercy Park. It came in a totally unexpected way.

If Eddie Barrows had had a social life of his own and a group of intimate friends, a change would

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have been noticed in him over that six-year period. The load of the secret grew heavier and heavier as the list of men involved with Joyce grew longer. But Eddie's job was not limited to particular hours of work. It was, primarily, to be available to Will twenty-four hours a day, round the clock. Eddie had only to hide his anxiety, his periods of bitterness, from Will. And this he could manage.

He didn't spy on Joyce. But he knew from time to time who had been added to the list. As each change came he mapped a new precautionary campaign—how to protect Will against this new set of circumstances. Without intending to, he actually cooperated with Joyce by steering Will away from what might become dangerous situations.

He had never again discussed the situation with Joyce, but now and then there was a look in her eyes, an unspoken word of gratitude on her lips. And he had to hand it to her. Will was blissfully happy. She kept that end of the bargain so well that people pointed to the Reids as a perfect couple. She really did love Will, Eddie thought, in spite of everything else. She was like a female Jekyll-and-Hyde, still able to control the change from one identity to the other. Eddie wondered if a day would come when she couldn't control it and the whole world would come tumbling down around their ears.

The most painful thing of all to Eddie was that, privately, he had to admit that his respect for Will had been slightly damaged. How could a man, so sensitive in other areas, be totally unaware of the fact that he was being deceived? Eddie thought that in Will's shoes he would have known, if he'd been deaf and blind.

The first week in December of the sixth year of the secret, Will Reid flew down to his farm near Lexington, Kentucky. He had bought a thoroughbred stud in England and the horse was being flown overseas to the Reid farm. Horses were Will's chief recreation and pleasure. Normally both Joyce and Eddie would have made the trip with Will, but a combination of circumstances kept both of them in New York. Eddie never went to Lexington unless it was urgent. Without discussing it, he and Will understood that Eddie didn't want to be around horses, and that he particularly didn't want to be in Kentucky—it was in Kentucky that his wife had died.

Joyce stayed behind because a play, in which Will had invested a considerable amount of money, was opening on Broadway. In affairs of the theater, the arts, Joyce was Will's right hand. It was decided she should stay in New York to attend the opening and make a detailed report to Will.

Eddie's secret wound hurt him when he saw Will off at the airport.

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He knew how Joyce would spend the five days Will was to be away. Her present involvement was with Colin Brewer, a matinee idol and movie star—Colin Brewer who came and went in the Reid house like a family friend. Eddie saw Will, tall, slim, elegant, turn at the top of the gangway to the plane and wave to him. The gesture meant: "My world and my loved one are in your hands!"

"God save me," Eddie muttered to himself.

That was a Thursday. The opening on Broadway was that night. Will was due back on Tuesday. Five full days.

Will maintained a private office in his den at the Fifth Avenue house. Eddie went there Friday morning to check Will's personal appointment book.

The play had received rave notices. He thought he might get a first hand account from Joyce, but when he got to the house, Lawson, the butler, told him that Joyce had gone away for the week-end—she had left shortly after breakfast that morning.

"Say where she was going?" Eddie asked.

"No, sir."

Eddie found himself staring hard at Lawson, trying to penetrate the man's trained mask. Did he have any suspicions? If he did, they were not there for Eddie to read.

So Joyce was taking advantage of her five days of freedom.

On Friday, December 7th, the newspapers, the radio and television, were crowded with news of a grim disaster. A Universal Airlines jet plane en route from Newark Airport to Miami had crashed in the mountains of North Carolina. There were no eyewitness accounts of the crash because the plane and everyone on board were reduced to ashes, along with several hundred acres of North Carolina woodland.

The C.A.B. launched an investigation. A Congressional Committee promised to tighten existing legislation. Even the President came into the picture because one of the passengers had been a famous and important diplomat engaged in key negotiations for the Western Alliance. The President expressed public regrets, and privately demanded to know if sabotage might be responsible.

There was no reason for even so shrewd an observer as Eddie Barrows to connect Joyce in any way with the crash. The passenger list was printed in Saturday's papers. The dead were all accounted for except for two persons, a Mr. and Mrs. Walter Dabney of Coral Gables, Florida.

But there was nobody named Dabney at the Coral Gables address given by the passengers, nor anyone who'd ever heard of the Dabneys. The ticket taker at Newark had the coupons, or stubs, of the tickets presented by Mr. and Mrs. Dabney at the gate, but no friends, relatives,

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or business acquaintances came forward in connection with "Mr. and Mrs. Dabney." They had gone through the gate at Newark to the plane, but that was the end. There was no stewardess to question. Dead.

A dry statement by one of the airline officials was printed in the Sunday papers. He indicated that a great many people travel under assumed names within the United States. "We have no way of checking on the truthfulness of names given at the airline counter or the reservation office unless people are traveling out of the country and have to show a passport, or unless they're going to some place where a tourist card is required. Mr. and Mrs. Dabney, whoever they really were, are dead. They'll eventually be traced."

Bodies could not be identified or counted. The crashed plane had been a crematorium.

On Monday morning, while Eddie was shaving, his phone rang. It was Will, calling from Lexington.

"I find I can get away a day early, Eddie," he said. "I'll arrive at La Guardia about four this afternoon. Do you know where Joyce is?"

Eddie's mouth was bone-dry. "She went away for the week-end."

"So Lawson tells me but he doesn't know where. I supposed she'd told you."

"No. I supposed she'd told you," Eddie said, his voice unsteady. "You've talked to Lawson this morning?"

"Just now." Will did not seem disturbed.

"She doesn't expect you till tomorrow," Eddie said.

"I know. She'll probably get home today sometime. Just let her know of my change in plans, will you, Eddie?"

"Sure," Eddie said. "I'll be at La Guardia anyway."

He put down the phone. He could feel angry blood pounding in his temples. She'd finally let her foot slip, damn her!

He stood by the phone, lather drying on his face. Then, without consulting the phone book or his pocket directory, he dialed a number. Almost instantly a man's voice, rich and deep, answered.

"Mr. Brewer?"

"Yes."

"Eddie Barrows here."

"Oh, hello, Eddie." The actor's voice sounded hollow.

"No time to beat around the bush," Eddie said. "Is Mrs. Reid there?"

There was a choking sound from the other end. "Are you out of your mind, Eddie?"

"I told you there was no time to kid around," Eddie said. "If you want to play games, hang up and tell her to get in touch with me at once." Eddie's voice was bitter. "I'll pretend it's a coincidence."

"She's not here, Eddie."

"Then where is she?"

"I—I haven't the faintest idea."

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Eddie detected just the slightest hesitation.

"Will's coming home a day early," Eddie said. "If Joyce isn't here the whole stinking ball game may explode right in your face. So get moving, Brewer. If you don't, I promise to serve you up in a cereal bowl for breakfast!"

Joyce didn't call, then or later.

Around noon Eddie was beginning to sweat. He called Brewer again. The actor sounded as though he'd been doing a little sweating on his own.

"I'll be honest with you, Eddie. I haven't seen or heard from Joyce since Thursday night. I went to the opening with her. I brought her home about two in the morning. I haven't seen or heard from her since."

"But you know where she is?"

"No!"

"She give you the air?" Eddie asked brutally.

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"Okay, skip it."

"I've tried one or two friends," Brewer said, his voice still shaky. "After you called. No one seems to know anything."

"Keep your fingers crossed," Eddie said, and meant it more for himself than for Brewer.

Eddie's heart was lead in his chest when he met Will at La Guardia at four o'clock. Will came across to the exit gate, so eager, so full of anticipation. He saw Eddie, smiled at him, and looked past him and around him and through him for Joyce. Then the smile faded.

"I'm sorry, Will," Eddie said. "Joyce hadn't come back from her week-end when I left the house. Something slipped up somewhere because neither Lawson nor I know where she went. She probably left a message or a note that went haywire somehow."

Will smiled. His lean handsome face mirrored the inner disappointment. "It's hell to love someone so much, Eddie," he said. But he still wasn't worried. "She told me she might go away by herself," he said, as they walked toward the car in the parking lot. "To catch her breath, she said. I feel the need of it sometimes myself—we're on a social merry-go-round so much of the time."

"She didn't expect you till tomorrow," Eddie said.

"She probably just took off without anything special in mind," Will said. "Telegraphed you or Lawson when she got somewhere and the telegram didn't get delivered."

"Yeah, something like that," Eddie said, chin buried in his coat collar.

Eddie had dinner with Will that night. Will was full of news about the new thoroughbred; he had greetings from old friends of Eddie's; he was absorbed with the next day's problems and appointments. By dinnertime he'd accepted the fact that Joyce wouldn't be

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back till the next day and he concealed the disappointment he must have felt. Certainly he did not look or act alarmed or anxious.

The alarm began to build the next day.

There was no word from Joyce. It suddenly occurred to Will that she might go direct to La Guardia to meet him on the Tuesday flight he'd originally planned to make. Eddie drove him out.

No Joyce. Not before the flight. Not after it.

Following a long wait, they went back to the car.

"You drive," Will said.

Eddie adjusted the seat to fit his short legs. He got in behind the wheel. Will sat with the tips of his fingers pressed against his eyelids.

"Eddie, I'm frightened," he said.

"Take it easy," Eddie said. "It's just some cockeyed mixup. She'll probably be home when we get there."

She wasn't. And there was no message.

Will paced the library, his face pale and gaunt. "She wouldn't hang me up like this, Eddie, if she could possibly have helped it. She'd have phoned by now. She—what the hell am I going to do, Eddie?"

Eddie drew deep on his cigarette. He knew what *he* would have to do. He'd find her in the next few hours if he had to tear the city apart brick by brick.

"If she'd been in an accident, you'd know by now," Eddie said.

"What else could have happened?"

Years of reading detective stories came to Eddie's assistance. "Amnesia," he said. "She could be wandering around somewhere, not knowing who she is or where she belongs."

Some chance!

Will reached for the telephone. "She'll hate me for it if there's some simple explanation," he said "but I'm calling the police. I've got to know, Eddie."

Being Will Reid, it was the Commissioner himself who was called, and half an hour later a Lieutenant from the Missing Persons Bureau was at the Reid home. He was one of the new breed of college-educated cops. He was polite, deferential, and tough. He asked all the routine questions, took half a dozen photographs of Joyce, a long list of her friends and acquaintances, and even a set of her fingerpints which she'd given during some civil defense drive.

Then he asked the crucial question.

"Is there any reason at all, Mr. Reid, why your wife might absent herself voluntarily?"

"Of course not!" Will said promptly.

The Lieutenant's eyes moved to Eddie who was squinting at him through cigarette smoke. Eddie's face was a frozen mask.

"No quarrels?" the Lieutenant asked Will.

"We've never quarreled—not in

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the eight years of our marriage."

"Not even about something trivial?"

"No."

"She wasn't angry because you didn't take her on your Kentucky trip with you?"

"Look here, Lieutenant, if there is such a thing as a perfect marriage, ours is it!" Will said.

Eddie looked down at the toes of his polished shoes. Just in case the Lieutenant should glance at him again, he kept looking down.

"We're already in motion," the Lieutenant said, "checking on unidentified accident victims. It's on a nation-wide teletype. We should close that door within a few hours. But suicide may not reveal itself quite so quickly."

"Don't be absurd," Will said, and he actually laughed.

"Enemies?" the Lieutenant asked. "Is there anyone who might wish to harm your wife—or you, through your wife?"

"I suppose everyone has enemies," Will said, shaking his head as he said it. "We are singularly free of them. Killing enemies, if that's what you mean, Lieutenant—absolutely no."

Eddie escorted the Lieutenant to the front door.

"Anything to add?" the detective asked.

Eddie shrugged. "He told you how it is. Amnesia is my bet."

Lawson, the butler, flagged Eddie on the way back to the library.

"Mr. Brewer called you, Mr. Barrows," he said. "He asked me to tell you, privately, to call him back. Something about the madam, I should think, from the way he sounded."

The small hairs rose on the back of Eddie's neck. "Thanks, I'll call him," he said. "After I get Mr. Reid bedded down."

Will was reasonable about it. Eddie persuaded him he needed rest. It would take some hours for the police to produce results.

"Take a couple of sleeping pills and get a solid few hours," Eddie urged. "If there's anything, Lawson or I will wake you."

"I don't know," Will said. "If I was needed—"

"Police routine is sure because its slow and thorough," Eddie said. "It's a hundred to one you won't hear from them before morning—if then."

So Will went up to his room and Eddie saw him take two of the sleeping pills from the bottle that was kept in the bathroom cabinet. When he was ready to undress, Eddie made for the door.

"Don't get lost, Eddie," Will said, like a small pathetic child.

"A lot of the people she knows—people we may not have thought of—will be doing the night club circuit about now," Eddie said. It was as good a story as any. "I thought I might look around a little. I'll be back before those pills wear off. And Lawson will be listening for the phone."

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"Bless you, Eddie," Will said.

Eddie didn't call Colin Brewer. He took a cab straight to the actor's Sutton Place apartment. It was shortly after midnight when he rang the doorbell.

Brewer was a dark romantic-looking man who might well have functioned in the days of the opera cloak, sword cane, and hansom cab. Eddie didn't like him, but he realized that he disliked the whole string of men who'd been involved with Joyce over the last six years. Eddie had always thought of Colin Brewer as vain, affected, patronizing.

The man who opened the door to Eddie was almost a stranger. He wore slacks and a white shirt, open at the neck. A dribble of cigarette ashes stained the front of the shirt. The dark eyes were bloodshot. The handsome, chiseled face looked out of focus, as though he'd had a mild stroke. And he was sweating—sweating as if this were a hot evening in the tropics instead of a New York December.

"You didn't phone," he said. "Lawson said the cops were there. I—"

"I didn't phone because I want to hear what I want to hear, not what you want to tell me," Eddie said. He was eight inches shorter than the actor, but he knew he could take him with one arm tied behind him.

Later, Eddie couldn't have told you anything about the actor's living room except that it was walled with autographed photographs of most of the famous people in Hollywood and on Broadway; whether the furniture was modern or period, whether the room was dark or well lit. All he remembered later was Brewer's white sweating face.

"So you decided to give," Eddie said, his voice harsh.

"Give?"

"You know where she is."

Brewer groaned, and it didn't sound like a fake. "I know where she *may* be," he said.

"Where?"

"Fertilizer on a North Carolina mountainside," Brewer said.

Eddie stared at him blankly. Brewer went over to the table in the center of the room and picked up a newspaper. It was several days old—the issue of December 7th. The headline story was the account of the crash of Universal Airline's jet passenger plane.

Eddie stared at it stupidly for a moment, and then something clicked in his mind like a lock snapping shut.

"She wasn't on it," Eddie said, not recognizing his own voice. "I read the passenger list at the time."

"Mr. and Mrs. Walter Dabney," Brewer said.

"The unidentified couple?"

Brewer nodded. "I was 'Mr. Dabney'—originally that is. I didn't take the trip finally, as you can see."

Eddie drew a deep breath. "Tell

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it to me quick, and no embroidery," he said.

"We were going to Florida for the few days. Will was to be in Kentucky," Brewer said, mopping his face with a soggy handkerchief. "Joyce made the reservations—under the name of Dabney. We went to the opening of the play Thursday night and we were supposed to take off for Florida the next morning."

"Jerks!" Eddie said, his jaw aching.

"We—we had a quarrel," Brewer said. "When I left her at home on Thursday night it was all off."

"You quarreled about some other guy? Your time was up?"

Brewer nodded miserably. "She had the tickets. I hoped she'd call and make it up. She didn't." He turned away. "She always liked to sit by the window in a plane. I wonder who the man was in Seat Twelve . . ."

"You read about the crash and you've kept this to yourself for five days?"

"How could I be sure? How can I be sure even now? She could have given the tickets to someone else. She could have sold them to someone at the airport. I kept hoping someone would come forward to claim 'Mr. and Mrs. Dabney.' If she gave the tickets to someone they'd probably make a joke of it to friends. 'If anything happens to Mr. and Mrs. Dabney you'll know who it is.' I kept waiting for that . . . and there's another reason."

"If you think I care about you or your reputation," Eddie said, his voice dangerously soft. "If you think—"

"I don't care what happens to me!" Brewer said. It was believable. This man had been skinned down to raw realities. "And it doesn't matter what you think of me, Eddie. I was having an affair with her, and Will is my friend. How much of a heel can you be? But if it hadn't been me it would have been someone else. You know that."

"Yes, I know it."

"The thing now is Will. If she is part of a pile of ashes in North Carolina—if she is dead—it'll kill him. But if I tell him how I know she might be there he won't even have a memory left. I can't do that to him. Maybe you can. Maybe you can prepare him for it. Maybe you can—"

"Shut up," Eddie said. He had to think. Brewer was right. The whole truth would destroy Will. Maybe, after weeks of no results from the police, Will would be prepared to accept the fact that she wasn't coming back, that she couldn't come back—that she was dead.

Suddenly Eddie was doing Brewer's thinking for him.

"Who knew about your proposed trip?"

"No one."

"The airline? Millions of people know you by sight."

"Joyce made the reservations. I

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never went to the airline offices—or to the airport."

"No one could know, then, unless Joyce told them?"

"You have no idea how careful she was," Brewer said. "She loved Will, in her way. She was caution itself."

"Who was the guy who cut you out?" Eddie asked.

Brewer shook his head. "I don't know. I—I suspected one or two men—but they're both around town now, alive and well. What do I do, Eddie? Will is all that matters now."

"You keep your mouth shut until I figure something out," Eddie said. "And if you don't, Brewer, so help me I'll take you apart, inch by inch."

"What a hell of a way to die," Brewer said. "On your way to the sunshine—"

It was the first phony note.

"You must have hated her for giving you the air," Eddie said.

Brewer looked at him, startled. "She wasn't easy to give up," he said.

The streets were empty canyons as Eddie walked slowly west, looking for a taxi. A curious numb feeling had come over him. He kept telling himself he had the answer. Joyce was ashes in North Carolina. She'd ditched Brewer and taken someone else with her on the jaunt to Florida. The tide had come in—and gone out for the last time.

But something nagged at Eddie. The polite, hard face of the Lieutenant from Missing Persons wouldn't stay out of his mind. "Enemies? Is there anyone who might wish to harm your wife—?" There was an old cliché about "a woman scorned."

But what about a man scorned? What about Colin Brewer? There was a hole in the actor's story, a flaw in his act, Eddie told himself.

The flaw was Brewer's concern for Will. Somehow it just didn't fit Eddie's concept of the actor as a man. If his story were true, there wasn't a chance in the world it would ever be discovered. All Brewer had to do was sit tight and keep his mouth shut. He would never have to involve himself. He'd never have to run the risk of publicity that might damage his precious career. A man who could calmly play games with Will's wife behind his back couldn't care so deeply now about Will's hurt.

So why did Brewer send for Eddie? Why did he reveal himself? Was it just that he was afraid Eddie would talk? Was his reason for telling the truth—if it was the truth—simply a device for persuading Eddie not to tell what he knew about the relationship?

Or could there be another and far more sinister reason? Was it vital to Brewer that Joyce's presence on the plane should be established, her death by accident officially accepted? Vital because she had died some other way at Brewer's hands?

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The bloodshot eyes, the blurred face, the gallons of sweat on a cold winter night—could they really be symptoms of concern for *Will?* A lover scorned, a man losing not only a desirable mistress but the support of a woman of great wealth and influence, a quarrel, a moment of homicidal anger—

But what about "Mr. and Mrs. Walter Dabney"? Had the tickets been given to someone else who'd died on the plane? Two people had taken the trip under the name of Dabney. Who? Why was no one missing? The tickets had been used, according to the papers. The airline held the stubs, or counterfoils. Two people traveling under the name of Dabney had died on that plane.

Or had they?

Eddie stood still in the deserted street, listening to the distant sound of a broken chain-link banging against the mudguard of a hurrying truck or taxi. He turned and walked briskly downtown.

The night manager of Universal Airlines across from Grand Central was willing to talk. Things were quiet at two A.M. Eddie, among other things, carried a complimentary press card in his wallet. He told the manager, a man named Klinger, that he was interested in tracing the missing Dabneys. It was a possible feature story.

"Let's check the routine first," he said. "The Dabneys go to the gate at Newark airport and present their tickets. What happens?"

"The girl at the gate takes their tickets, tears off the stubs, and passes them through the gate."

"Without knowing who they are? Anyone could use the tickets?"

"Well, she has a reservation list," Klinger said. "Usually on a clipboard. She'd check the tickets against her list and ask if they were Mr. and Mrs. Dabney." Klinger grinned. "They could be anyone, of course, but if they said 'yes,' there'd be no reason for the girl to doubt it, nor any way to check it."

"So they go through," Eddie said, "to the plane." His hands, plunged deep in his overcoat pockets, were tightly clenched. "Having gone through, they decide not to take the trip—or that they have to make a last-minute phone call—or what have you. How do they get back off the air strip?"

"Through the gate again."

"Would the girl notice?"

"Of course. She'd stop them and explain they couldn't get back in without a pass-out check."

"Let's try another one," Eddie said. "Suppose they decided not to take the trip. They wouldn't care about getting back in again. Are there other ways they could leave without going through that gate?"

"No."

"If they wanted to badly?"

"It's remotely possible. Very remote," Klinger said. "They'd be out in the open on the strip. If they headed for a wrong exit, or a hangar, or some place they shouldn't go,

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they'd be spotted and stopped—people aren't allowed to wander around the air strip. It's dangerous—planes coming and going. I suppose there could be a slip-up, but to my knowledge there never has been."

"So there's no way they could come away from the plane without the girl at the gate knowing?"

"None."

"She could forget later?"

Klinger smiled wryly. "After the crash? That would jog her memory, don't you think? And with the Dabneys missing—?"

Eddie sat silent, scowling for a moment. "Suppose I went to see them off. I go through the gate with them. I leave again once they board the plane."

"You couldn't go through the gate to see them off."

"No one ever goes through the gate to see friends off?"

"Against the rules."

Eddie let out his breath in a long sigh. "Well, thanks anyway," he said. "It was just an idea." He stood up. He stared at Klinger. "Hold the phone!" he said. "Suppose Eddie Arcaro was going, or the Vice-president of the United States, or the Queen of England? You mean *nobody* would go through that gate to see them off?"

"Well, that's a little different," Klinger said. "The press, maybe special government officials. Yes, they'd be let through under those circumstances. But they'd be shooed off the strip and back through the gate when the plane was ready to rev."

"The plane that crashed," Eddie said, his voice unsteady with excitement. "Wasn't there an important diplomat aboard? Didn't the President himself express regrets about the man's death? How about him? Weren't there any people to see him off?"

Klinger's eyes widened. He picked up his phone and dialed an extension. He asked a few brief questions. Finally he looked at Eddie, some of the excitement transferring to him. "Fifteen or twenty people went through the gate to see the Ambassador off."

"Individually checked?"

"No."

"Then when they left, the Dabneys could have left with them—if they'd changed their minds about going?"

"They could have and no one would have been the wiser," Klinger said. "You may have hit on it, Mr. Barrows. But why haven't they come forward to explain?"

Eddie shrugged. "Your own officials accounted for that," he said. "People travel under false names for reasons they don't want made public."

Eddie could almost see it. The quarrel, starting perhaps the night before at the theater. The next day they are still at it. They start out on their secret trip to Florida, still quarreling. They actually get through the gate to the plane.

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There the quarrel reaches a climax. Joyce refuses to go on.

They walk back off the strip, surrounded by the Ambassador's well-wishers, and they go somewhere to finish the quarrel—probably to Brewer's apartment. There, in a fit of rage, Brewer kills Joyce. How to get rid of her body? Days of anxiety, of planning. Perhaps he'd managed it late at night—a service elevator, his car . . . He keeps in touch, torn by anxiety, and learns from Lawson that the cops have been called in.

Brewer is sweating with terror now, half out of his mind.

He calls in Eddie and tells a story that might so easily have been the truth. If there haven't been any slips it might check out. But better to be exposed as a heel and have Joyce pronounced dead in the wreck than to hold his tongue and perhaps, eventually, through Eddie's secret knowledge, have the police down on his neck. Eddie would keep the truth buried—good old loyal Eddie—to save Will from hurt. Good old sucker Eddie would actually be doing everything possible to keep the murder a secret forever . . .

Eddie took a cab back uptown to the Reid house. He had no real proof yet, but there was a way to dig it out, now that he knew almost certainly what had happened. He'd have to have a case before he could go to Will and to the police. He'd just make sure Will was asleep and not needing him, then he'd go back to his own apartment and plan his campaign.

Lawson was dozing in an armchair in the study, directly beside the phone. There had been no calls. Will hadn't come down from his bedroom, and Lawson assumed the pills had done their work.

"I'll just go up and have a look at him," Eddie said.

There was a small night-light burning on the bureau in Will's room. Will himself had undressed, got into pajamas, and was sleeping a deep drugged sleep.

Eddie looked down at him, his heart aching. Why should a thing like this happen to Will? Why should such a good, honest, kind man be given the triple business?

Eddie pulled a light blanket up over Will's shoulder, tenderly, like a parent with a child. How to solve this thing? He could forget what he felt certain was a fact, and let Brewer get away scot-free; he could let Will's pain fade slowly away, finally accepting the fact that the mystery of Joyce's disappearance was unsolvable.

Eddie wandered over toward the bureau. He'd taken a cigarette out of his pocket and found his lighter was dry. Will's would be there on the bureau along with his wallet, keys, and loose change.

Eddie picked up Will's lighter and snapped it into flame. The flame never reached his cigarette. He held it, flickering, over the bureau as his blood turned to ice.

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There, in the center of the collection of coins and keys, was a ring. It was Joyce's ring—her wedding ring. Eddie knew it well. He'd helped Will pick it out eight years ago. And Eddie knew something else about that ring.

That ring had never been off Joyce's finger since the day of the wedding.

Eddie leaned against the bureau, fighting for breath. The lighter petered out and the gold case was hot in the palm of his hand. He turned slowly toward the bed to stare at his sleeping friend.

Will!

He could see how it must have happened. The plane reservations—Joyce had been careless with them. Will must have found them sometime before he was due to take off for Kentucky. He had found them and been assailed by suspicions and doubt. He would have to know.

Eddie could see Will waving to him from the ramp of the Kentucky-bound plane. That had been Thursday. Where had he left the plane? Pittsburgh? Louisville? Certainly he had been at Newark Airport on Friday morning. He would have been burning to know the answer to the question: Who was to be the man in Seat 12?

Joyce, her quarrel with Brewer a reality—a quarrel that happened just as Brewer described it—had come to the airport. Probably alone, planning to turn in the extra ticket. She must have almost died on the spot when she turned at a gentle touch on her arm and found herself facing Will.

Eddie could imagine Will asking gently, "May I join you?"

In a daze she allows Will to take her through the gate on the two Dabney tickets. She gets her bearings once they are through. Of course they won't go anywhere on the plane. This is the moment of truth for Joyce. She must tell Will, without evasion, the whole story.

So they go back out, surrounded by the Ambassador's friends. Not home. It would be impossible to smash their world in those surroundings, so crowded with happy memories—false memories, but none the less happy ones. So they go somewhere, and Joyce, in her straightforward manner, tells Will the whole business from start to finish. It would be the one thing in the whole world Will couldn't take. At such a moment balance and sanity fly to the winds.

Will had done it somehow—he had killed her somehow. Then he'd had the same problem Eddie had attributed to Brewer—disposal of Joyce's body. In Will's case there had been no time. He'd have to be in Kentucky soon or there'd be inquiries. Yet he'd managed it, and he'd remembered to remove the one sure article of identification—the ring that had never been off Joyce's finger, that would identify her in the seconds it would take to read the inner inscription.

All right, Eddie. Now what?

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He stared at the ring. There is always some careless slip in a crime. Just lying there, with the keys and change! He should wake Will and have it out with him now, drugs or no drugs. But he couldn't. He should take the ring with him in case Lawson or someone else spotted it before Will was awake. But Eddie couldn't make his hand move toward the ring.

He had to get out of here. He had to think. God knows, emotionally Will was justified. But how long could he live with his guilt? Eddie could see it. A few weeks to put all his complex affairs in shape, and then a carefully written confession and a bullet between the eyes.

But there would be time for Eddie to plan his own course.

He staggered down the stairs, like a drunk, picked up his coat in the hall, and without a word to Lawson, stumbled out into the deserted Avenue. The two-block walk to his apartment seemed like an eternity.

He let himself in the front door of the brownstone and climbed slowly to his second-floor apartment. He was just putting his key in the door when he was aware of a moving shadow at the far end of the hall.

His muscles tensed. Some petty thief? An unexpected rage welled up in him. Let the guy come for him! He'd tear him to pieces. That's what he needed—an outlet for his own turmoil.

He pretended to fumble with the key, his alerted senses telling him the shadow was moving forward. He was prepared to turn, the killing skills he'd learned in the old days ready for action.

"I thought you'd never get here, Eddie," Joyce Reid said, in her low throaty voice.

Somehow Eddie got the door open. He couldn't speak. His lips moved but his mouth felt as though he'd been given a jawful of novocaine.

It was like a scene played for a second time—the mink coat tossed carelessly onto the couch, he sitting in a chair, she prowling the room. Vaguely he remembered it had been a green dress before; now the dress was a sandy brown.

"I've been given up for lost, Eddie?" she asked, her voice bitter.

"You've been murdered by two different people in the last three hours," he said, the words coming with difficulty.

"You've got to help me, Eddie."

"To hell with you," he said, fumbling for a cigarette. He remembered that his lighter was dry—and that a wedding ring lay among the loose change on Will's bureau.

"You didn't go straight to Will with the truth about Colin?"

"No."

"Bless you, Eddie." It was Will's phrase, automatically used.

"But I know about the Florida trip, and that Brewer didn't take it—and now that you didn't take it.

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What are you trying to do to Will, Joyce? Six days—seven days today."

She faced him, and her eyes seemed deep as wells. "You've got to help me to die, Eddie," she said.

He just stared at her, the unlit cigarette dangling from his numb lips.

"We were going, Colin and I, on that plane," she said. "We'd quarreled the night before. I had the reservations. Do you know what I did, Eddie? I went to the airport, meaning to turn in one ticket. There was a young man there—attractive, pleasant—trying to get space on the plane. There were no seats left. I offered him my extra seat—Seat Twelve." She seemed to writhe inside the sand-brown dress. "He was grateful. I don't even know his name. But I had plans for him, Eddie. The tide was in—and high! I went through the gate with him and suddenly I realized what I was doing—abandoning all caution, ready to run any kind of risk. I knew I'd come to the end of the road then—the long, twisting, terrible road.

"I left him by the plane and went out with a crowd of people there to see someone off. I went to a cheap hotel and registered under a phony name. I had my luggage. I had to think. I knew I couldn't go on with Will. I couldn't protect him any more. I'm done for, Eddie. It's out of control. Then, the next morning I read about the plane. I realized that the young man, traveling on a Dabney ticket, had died. There'd been no Mrs. Dabney."

She paused, then whispered. "It seemed like a gift, an act of fate. Somehow I'd been given an out—but I couldn't seem to figure just how. If I was dead it would hurt Will—but at least it would be a clean hurt. How could I place myself on that plane without letting him know the whole truth? When you're under pressure, Eddie, you don't think straight. Tonight I thought of a way and I came here to get your help."

"What makes you think I'd help you?"

"Because you love Will," she said. "Believe me, Eddie, it's the only way to save him from something much worse." Her voice was anguished. "I've told you, Eddie—it's out of control!"

"What do you think I could do?"

"Frighten Colin Brewer into everlasting silence and make him do what he must do for me."

"What must he do?"

"Tell Will a story and act it out with conviction. Acting is his trade. He can do it."

"And the story?"

"That he was planning a Florida week-end with some girl. She can be nameless. Colin will love sounding like a gentleman! He had the reservations. At the last minute the plan was given up. He told me about it Thursday night at the theater. I offered to take one of the tickets off his hands and turn in the

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other at the airport. I was eager for a change. Will knows that. So I took the tickets. Colin is to say he thought no more about it until he read about the crash. He wasn't sure if I'd finally gone or not. He kept waiting in the hope that the Dabneys would be identified. Now he feels certain I was on the plane and he has to bring Will the tragic news."

Eddie could begin to feel blood in his veins again. "I think Will might buy it," he said slowly.

"Could you make Colin go through with it?" she asked. "Could you make him afraid ever to talk?"

There was a way, Eddie thought. He could go to Brewer with the case for murder he'd built up against him. He could threaten to go to the police with it.

"If he never knows what's become of you I think I can frighten Brewer into doing what you want," Eddie said.

"Oh, Eddie, Eddie!" She sank down on the couch, the palms of her hands pressed against her eyes.

"What will you do?" he asked.

"Disappear, evaporate, change my name — Mexico, South America, Europe. What difference does it make?"

"How about money?"

Her smile was bitter. "I've put away sums of money from time to time—just in case. I can get along. You'll do it, Eddie?"

He took the cigarette out of his mouth and crumpled it in the palm of his hand. "I think so—yes, I will."

She was on her feet, sliding into the mink coat. "Take care of Will, Eddie. I know it's hard for you to believe, but I love him."

"I believe it," he said. "You've got a lot of courage, Joyce."

"I'm the world's gutless wonder," she said. "Would I be in this spot if I weren't?" At the door she turned. "You're a doll, Eddie."

"One thing," he said. "Tonight I saw your wedding ring on Will's bureau. He was asleep—with pills. You know what I thought? I thought he'd killed you and taken the ring off your finger to prevent identification."

"Oh, Eddie! Poor Will!"

"What was he doing with it?"

"I gave it to him the day before he went to Kentucky. One of the small stones was lost. He had either forgotten to take it to the jeweler, or he was bringing it back to me repaired."

She looked down at her bare left hand. "I—I wish I had it."

"No!"

She drew a deep breath. "Goodbye, Eddie—dear Eddie."

The door opened—and closed. She was gone.

He stood for a long time, staring at the door, grinding the dead cigarette in his hand to dust. Then he turned to the telephone and with a kind of grim determination he began to dial Colin Brewer's number.

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Two spinsters disappear. But one is a phony — and Perry's got to find *her* before the REAL one *dies!*

7 The Case of the STEPDAUGHTER'S SECRET by Erle Stanley Gardner
Perry tells his client how to handle a blackmailer. *"KILL him!"*

8 NO DUST IN THE ATTIC by Anthony Gilbert
Jan knows an OPEN GRAVE is ready for *her* — *but she can't do one thing about it!*

9 THE LATE CLARA BEAME by Taylor Caldwell
Was it *suicide* or *murder?* One person knows — and is ready to KILL *AGAIN!*

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